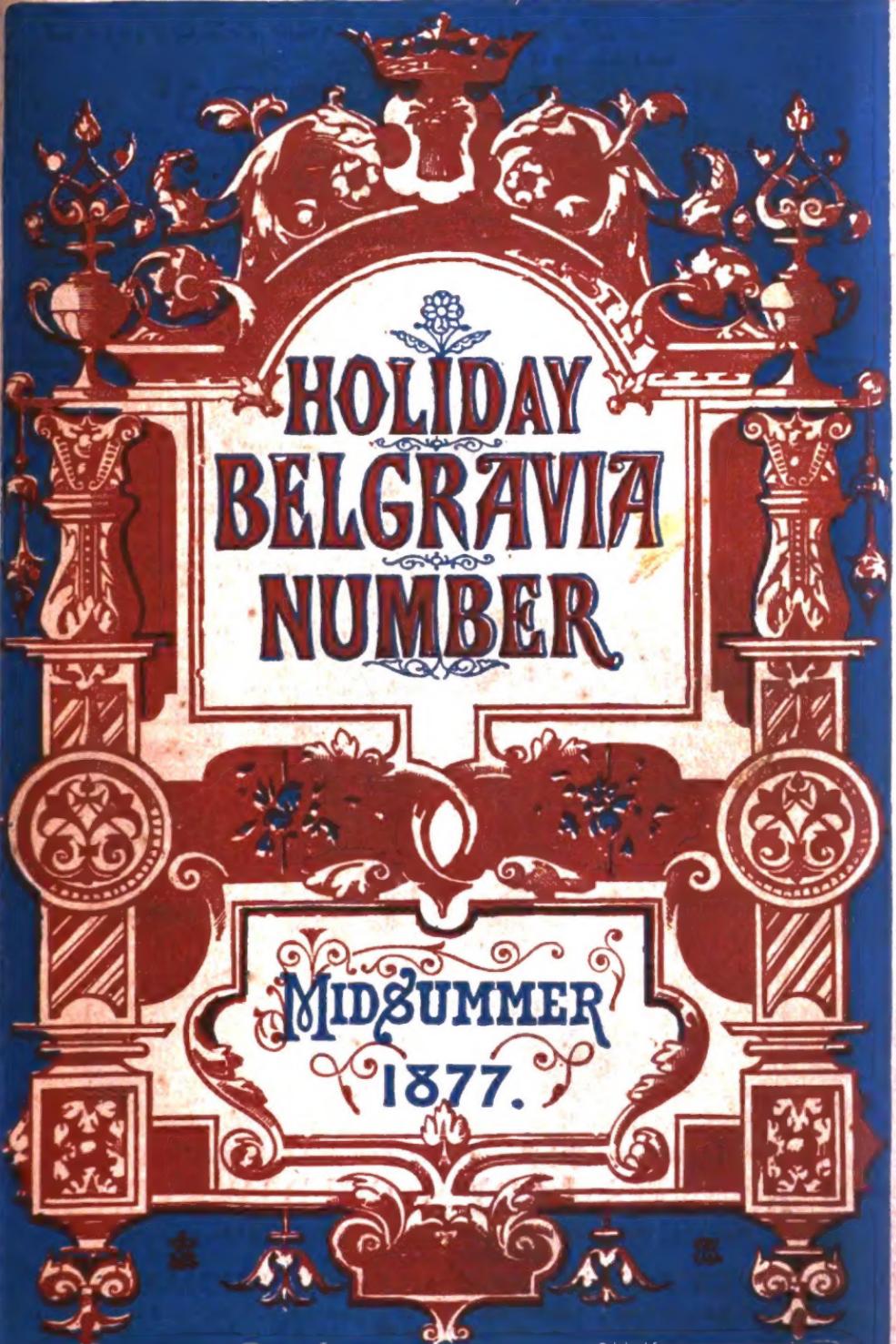


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**HOLIDAY  
BELGRAVIA  
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**MIDSUMMER  
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## **Stories from Belgravia Annuals, Part 4 Midsummer (1876-1895)**

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## Dream Music.

‘Music,’ I exclaimed, ‘is a bore!’ and the youngest Miss Sheepshanks immediately replied, ‘Oh, Mr. B., you *cannot* really mean that!’—stay, was it not the eldest or the middle Miss Sheepshanks who thus spoke? It matters not, for all three make exactly the same remarks, and no man remembers a difference among them.

The wisdom of the sage was refuted this time, and a ‘soft answer’ stirred me to wrath. I continued, ‘When the Heavenly Maid was young, she doubtless possessed the charms of her age and condition. But that is a very long time ago, and at present she is old and worn, stupid and wearisome. Her companions are all that is dreariest. She chaperons the abominable thing: “Some tea and a little music;” “Music and conversation;” “Mr. Tumpkins has kindly promised to bring his accordion;” and so on. Under protection of this horrid bore, creatures who cannot talk themselves impose silence on the universe! And the dismal crew of connoisseurs!—animated fiddle-cases! old drums stored with echoes! What being that has real life in him cares for music? what pretty woman will distort herself to sing? what musician was ever good for aught? “Soothes the savage breast”? Why, the original discoverer flayed his rival—a better man, I’ll be sworn! Nero was the best amateur of his day; Cæsar Borgia, and Butcher Cumberland, and Couthon were eminent musicians. Miss Sheepshanks, I hate music!’

I was roused to this outburst on a rainy day at Scarborough, when the very smoking-room was invaded by a sound of pianos and school-girl practice. Miss Sheepshanks only answered absently, ‘You strange man!’ whilst pretending not to see the flaccid youth approaching, who implored her ‘to oblige.’ But a tall man, standing behind the lady’s chair, seemed struck with my nonsense. I had before observed his thin face, his intent black eyes, and a strange listening air which marked him—not the air of one heeding a conversation, but of one expecting sounds from without. A handsome fellow he was, still young, and courteous, though silent and absorbed.

Miss Sheepshanks’ song was the last cut. I fled to my room. Whilst lighting a candle, this gentleman approached and spoke, with a shy but pleasant manner. He asked if I really felt

such contempt for music, and I admitted the exaggeration; adding, however, that millions of feeble folk are ruined by a pleasure which saps their strength with dreams, and often muddles their very brain. This proposition he accepted with emphasis, and we walked upstairs. It was early, the conversation was agreeable, and I invited him into my room. The topic was sustained, and with surprise I marked a downright hatred and fear of music in my companion, puzzling to account for. He talked well upon this theme, evidently his favourite, and I was amused to humour him. We sat late, we met next day, and next; we became intimate. Many peculiarities of manner, which I need not dwell on here, gave me a singular interest in my new acquaintance. And at length I said to him, 'My dear fellow, if it were possible to meet a murderer at a Grand Hotel, I should think you had made away with an organ boy, and were haunted by his hurdy-gurdy.'

He smiled awkwardly, opened his mouth to speak, but kept silence; then broke out suddenly a few moments later. 'I will tell you,' he said. 'I have no crime on my conscience, but I am haunted. Why it is, what it means, whither it is forcing me, I know not. There is no sense in it, no cause nor result that I can see. If my ancestor murdered the girl, what have I to do with it? Mind you, there is not the shadow of a suspicion that he did, but how otherwise account for my persecution? What would they have me do? I am ready! But, no! not a sign, nor a hint, nor a warning! only this swell of music on the air, the rustle of women's dresses, and the shuffling of feet; then, sometimes, the rush of wind, and the whispering overhead, as I heard it that first night on the stairs when I let those devils loose. It is possession, B., wanton and purposeless spite of the fiend, such as we read of in the Bible. There is the face, but what does that prove? Heaven knows I have thought as a man thinks whose life is hanging on the solution of a riddle; I have prayed them to tell me what to do, what they want. But no answer! It is possession, I tell you—sheer malice of the devil—which has fixed on me.'

An excellent custom has been introduced of late in France, which abbreviates a story by placing a mere note of interrogation, thus—?—for the commonplace reflections which arise in hearing some extraordinary statement. If that custom had the franchise here, I would use it. P.'s explanation was confused enough, and the substance of it sufficiently amazing; but I did not for a moment think him mad. His body might be unsound, his nerves or his blood wrong, but his head, I felt certain, was reasonable enough. 'You don't explain yourself clearly,' I said.

'Don't I? Well, I'll write it. You shall have the story

to-night, and pray God you make more sense out of it than I have done. Yes, I would rather write it. Perhaps I should have been wise to make a confidant before, but I had no one. Good-bye !'

He went off hurriedly to put his perplexities on record, and I went to billiards. In the evening a servant brought me the manuscript, which I transcribe. Thus it runs:—

'There is no beginning to my story; I plunged into the middle horror at once. My father was a successful pleader, rich enough, very pious, and very strict with me. I was educated at home, and I was called to the bar at twenty-one years old. All that needs be said of that time is that I was perfectly innocent, and contented to be so, scound of body as of mind. My father's influence got me employment from the first, and I made more money than I knew how to spend. I lived at home, and it never occurred to me to seek those amusements which young men fancy. I was no dreamer, nevertheless. My idle hours were passed in athletics, which brought me heavy sleep at night. And life passed smoothly for twenty-five years.

'My father sent for me one day, and announced that our cousin Frederick was dead—intestate, as people believed; in that case, the family estate descended to us. He explained that a quarrel between his father and Frederick's, kept up to the second generation, had barred all intercourse between our houses; told me to search for a will; gave me some moral maxims on the vanity of wealth, and dismissed me to B——. This ancient town belongs almost wholly to us, and before the Reform Bill it gave the Percevals an almost uncontested seat. That event and the railways killed it, for B—— lived on the coaching traffic, and the interested prodigality of its landlords. We kept a house in the town, and "encouraged" the local tradesmen. When the borough was disfranchised, my great-uncle reduced this expense, withdrawing to his country seat some miles away. His son, the next owner, advertised Perceval House "to let," and Frederick had gone further still. Finding that no one would take the place, he divided it into three tenements and let them separately. The family lawyer, Alleyne, gave me these details when I dined with him on my arrival. He recollected Perceval House in all its magnificence, and such an account he gave of it as roused my curiosity.

'Next day I went to see the place, and found a stately old building, *entre cour et jardin*. The trees had been felled, and rough palings run across the garden, dividing it into three parts. Parterre and shrubbery were overgrown with weeds, clothes hung to dry, and dirty children played on the unkempt grass. Both

wings were full of lodgers, navvies and porters, and such kind of people, but the main block announced empty rooms. I rang, and a stolid woman opened the fine old door. She took it for granted, without asking, that I was in search of lodgings, and showed me the rooms disengaged. Amongst them was the grand suite, of course, three large saloons, and a study, on the first floor. Not a stick of furniture remained in them, but they had painted ceilings, and carved mantels, and parqueterie floors. The woman grew quite hot in declaring that these apartments had never been let since the house was built, and that they "eat the roof off." Acting on sudden impulse, I took a small sitting-room and a bedroom that happened to be vacant on the next floor, and moved into them that night. The landlady never asked my name.

'I used to drive with Alleyne, every morning, to the country house some miles away, where we looked over papers, searching for the will. At night I dined with him, or entertained him at the hotel. I had work enough to do after returning home, and several evenings passed before I became conscious that towards nine o'clock a faint and gentle harmony began to rise, as if from the empty rooms beneath. You remember that I am constitutionally indifferent to music, and, besides, I was used to hear sound without noticing it, as are all Londoners. When, at length, my ears became aware of the mighty serenade, it caused me no interruption, but rather pleasure. The tunes seemed to be rhythmic, like those of an old-fashioned dance, very soft and agreeable; the instrument a piano, somewhat thin of tone. It puzzled me somewhat to imagine whence the sounds came in such a neighbourhood, but the matter did not dwell in my mind.

'One evening Alleyne invited me to a formal dinner of notables, when, of course, the heir-expectant was received with all honour. The company proved to be pleasant, and it was in a sort of intoxication with which wine had nothing to do that I sought my lodgings towards eleven o'clock. On reaching the hall door, I heard much more plainly the music to which I had grown accustomed, and as I climbed the stairs it sounded louder. On the grand landing, before the empty rooms, I heard yet more—hurrying feet and rustle of dancing, even, I thought, whispers and low laughter. It seemed very strange that the staircase should be left dark when such a large entertainment was going on, but there might be reasons. After listening a moment, I went on my way. The evening's excitement kept me waking, but the music never ceased. By times it would softly fail and die to a quivering breath of sound, and then would swell to a rolling volume, borne on wings that rushed along the passage.

Towards daylight I fell asleep, pleasantly interested and curious about these people who refilled my forefather's house with sounds of hospitality.

'When the slatternly servant brought my tea, I asked about them, congratulating the landlady on securing lodgers for her rooms at last. The girl answered, staring, that they were still unlet, as always. Much surprised, I made inquiries about the party, and she laughed. "You must ha' brought the party from Lawyer Alleyne's, sir, in yer yed." The woman thought I had been drunk, and her mistress arrived at the same conclusion when I appealed to her.

'The thing now became a mystery, not without awfulness. I did not for a moment believe that any strange concurrence of echoes would repeat such sounds. Either they were created in my diseased brain, or they were supernatural. I drew Alleyne into my room next night, at the fated hour, and when the music was at its highest, I carelessly invited him to listen. He heard nothing. The music, then, was inside my head, or invisible powers nightly raised it for me, alone, the heir, in this ancient house. I watched myself, I listened with the care of one who has to pronounce on his own sanity. And in a few days I decided that the music was no fancy of my brain, but real, a supernatural visitation. Then it took another tone. The spirits, demons, or whatever they were, knew my discovery, felt they were known. And they addressed my soul itself, in trills of sweetness unutterable, with joyous laughter, with the coo of young girls' voices whispering love. They pleaded, they coaxed, they scolded, urging me to go down. I resisted, until, with a burst of merry laughter, the concert ceased at dawn. There was nothing terrible in it—rather a gleeful prank, like those attributed to fairies. But I was frightened. Had a ghost visited my room, I was man enough to tear his sheet off, but this soft harmony thrilled me. There is in living creatures a fear of the dead, a hatred of matter for spirit released. And I felt, too, that strange things would arrive if I resisted the impulse to enter those haunted rooms. I would have fled, but will had left me. Each night the enchantment had more power. And at length, to cut the record of impressions short, it triumphed.

'It was near midnight. I rose and dressed, strangely calm, descended the dark, broad stairs, and paused before the door. The music seemed to retire at my approach, breathing softly from a distance, but I heard again the rustle of dresses and the shuffling of feet. The door opened at a touch. A candle in my hand faintly lighted the vast apartment, leaving the corners shadowed.

No soul was there. I walked in, following the music. A second door gave way, and I entered another room, as dark, as empty as the first. Crossing two more apartments, I reached the small study, pushed open the door—and what happened? I know not! There was nothing there. As the hinges turned I saw all the room, and there was nothing. But I was seized. The air did not stir—there was no motion; my limbs were untouched, but my soul was grasped. The hair on my flesh stood up. I dropped the candle and fled.

‘What guided me through the pitch-dark rooms and up the stairs? The music which had ceased broke out again, pursued me, whirled and galloped round me, in triumphant ecstasy. All the house was full of it, clanging, pealing. Like a whirlwind the crowd environed me, unfelt and unseen, yet stifling. I called on Heaven in my dread; but they pressed closer and closer, swirling round in eddies, formless, impalpable souls torturing my soul. They held me up, they guided me. My body was dead, but it obeyed them, and they dropped me at my own bedside, where I awoke in the grey morning.

‘A dream, you say, all this; and I myself should almost have thought so, in the sunshine of next day. But when I paid my bill, in feverish haste to be gone, the astonished landlady asked for my candlestick, which was missing. “You will find it in the rooms below,” I stammered; and she went to seek, grumbling. I awaited her return with awful dread. If she found it not, the adventure was a dream. But the woman came back with lowering face, the broken candlestick in her hand. It was a mercy, she said, that everybody was not burnt alive with my silly tricks. Respectable people didn’t go rampaging about a house in the dark, dropping their candles, and splashing the grease about, and running away at daylight as if the bailiffs were after them. I heard without listening, my eyes fixed upon that evidence of my visit to the haunted rooms. I would not remain longer in B——. Fortunately the work was done which had called me thither, and no one arose to dispute our inheritance. Telling Alleyne to forward the papers of the deceased, I returned to town. My father, not expecting me, was out, and I dined alone. As the fated hour approached, I sent for wine, and kept the butler with me on various pretences. Punctually, as the clock struck, it began—the music—and I heard it with a start of despair. My act had loosed the fiends, and they followed me. They follow me still! I dismissed the servant, and sat listening, waiting helplessly for that which was to come. The strains swept to my ear, surrounding me with gleesome melody. Dreading to see I knew not what, my eyes were

fixed upon the fire. A vision formed there—I beheld the black rooms at B—— lit up, and peopled with a throng of dancers. They wore the costumes of a century ago. The dresses and the movements were clear, but no face could I observe for an instant. When I fixed my gaze on them, they changed and blurred, as wet colour blurs under the hand, to reappear, as it seemed, when my eyes turned aside. Presently the vision drew nearer, swiftly enlarging and approaching until it absorbed the real scene. The room in which I sat was no longer my own, but the haunted chamber. My chair stood in the midst of shadows, crowded by phantom brocades and velvets, girdled by featureless ghosts, which laughed and whispered round me. Unable to move a limb, I sat, gasping with horror. The terrors of hell had got hold upon me.

‘The music stopped suddenly; a moment more, and brain or heart would have given way. The spectres fell back from me, and a vista opened up the room. At the further end sat a young girl before some instrument like a grand piano. Her fingers rested on the keys, and she looked over her shoulder down the avenue of ghostly silk and velvet. That face did not blur nor shift like those around. I saw it as one human being sees another; the blonde hair restrained by ribands in Greek fashion, the fresh small mouth parted, and the black eyes, which surveyed me with wondering amusement. The phantoms faded, and my terrors departed with them; we were left alone. I saw that lovely child as plainly, as substantially, as though we had both been flesh and blood, in one room. I see her now and always. She has ever the same look of curious surprise, the same graceful attitude. For an instant we gaze at each other, and then comes a rush of sound, a film over-spreads the picture, and I tremble.

‘You asked why I hate music, and I have told you. Custom does not lessen the thrill with which I hear those strains commence, nor calm my fear of those swaying, featureless things. It is five years since this possession began. Do me more justice than to suppose it fancy. Talk to me about it, mark me when the vision comes. Often now the girl appears without other notice than the sudden stirring of my hair. She is watching me as I write, smiling at me over her shoulder. Now—now comes the film and the shudder. I have trusted to you, B., a secret which is wearing out my life. For Heaven’s sake, think of it. If I could know what they want, these spirits, I would sacrifice all for peace.

‘PERCEVAL.

‘P.S.—From old papers found in my cousin’s house, and from

my father's dim recollections, I gather that my great-grandfather seduced an Italian girl, by whom he had a daughter. She disappeared, and he married my ancestress. The daughter's husband laid claim to our property, alleging a secret wedding, but he lost his suit. The family quarrel to which I have referred arose out of these transactions, my grandfather protesting against some conduct of his brother's. Can those events have aught to do with my persecution ?'

I felt interest enough in my acquaintance to talk the matter over with him several times, but we made nothing of it. He was certainly not diseased. I am one of the happy few whom the unseen world does not interest at all—who regard the ghost question with perfect indifference, so long as the ghosts do not intrude. If man possess an immortal soul, it cannot be improbable that it should revisit the glimpses of the moon, and the evidence of all times and nations unites to support the theory that it does so. Inclining towards this view, I did not harass Perceval by questioning his facts, but all our cogitations failed to explain them. I was present at many seizures, and observed my friend closely. There was nothing that resembled a fit. Quietly he would say, 'I hear it,' without breaking off his occupation. After a few moments a shudder would pass through him ; and then, with equal calmness, he would remark, 'She is there by your side,' or opposite, or wherever it might be. One may be philosophical about things of the other world, and yet feel a curious sensation on hearing that a ghost is present and visible in one's own room.

But the human creature gets tired of all novelties, and after some months Perceval's apparition began to bore me. We were now in London, and his admirable dinners, excellent wine, and vigorous conversation upon other topics gave me patience ; but the end arrived. Self-interest stirred me to real thought, for Perceval was an acquaintance much too useful to drop. One night I had an idea. 'There is a slender fact in your knowledge,' I said, 'which may possibly bear upon this haunting—the conduct of your ancestor towards his mistress. She was a singer, you say, daughter of an Italian musician, and it is curious that music is employed to disturb you. The girl left descendants. Why not seek them out ? In the first place, it is an honourable duty, if they have been ill-treated by your family ; and, in the second place, they may be able to break the spell.'

Perceval snatched at the idea, and hurriedly composed an advertisement. I kept away from him during the next twenty-four hours ; but on the day following he burst into my room. 'Read that !' cried the demoniac ; 'I owe you more than life !' Softly

wondering whether my friend would value his existence at a 'monkey,' if that recompense were asked, I opened the letter.

'For six years I have been stirring your dull conscience——'

'Six years!' cried Perceval; 'mark that!'

'I would not use the weapons in my power, for you have done me no harm, and people speak well of you. You appeal to me at length, and if you dare do justice, you may recover happiness. Call at the address inclosed, and hear what duty enjoins upon you. —Az. HOPKINS!'

'That spoils it, Perceval!' I exclaimed. "'Az." is not bad. It may stand for Azimuth, which is a great name in necromancy. But Hopkins! *Descinit in piscem*, &c. And he lives in Soho, whence nothing comes but French bakers, communists, ballet girls, and old masters.'

'Do you observe,' cried Perceval, disregarding, 'how clear the answer is? No one has heard my sufferings except you, but this man knows them. He might have used more awful means, had he chosen, for the object of stirring my conscience. I am on my way now, B., towards freedom and happiness.'

Or towards swindling robbery, I thought, but did not say so. In truth, the plot was marvellously carried out, if plot it were. Perceval did not ask my company, but I felt inquisitive enough to go with him. In the blankest and dingiest street of Soho we found the address given, one of three houses which looked empty. Their windows were blind with dust; no curtains showed through them; a few broken flower-pots stood on the sills, but even the ghosts of vegetation had faded. Perceval rang at a door of which the paint had blistered and fallen away, leaving gaps and circles. The small boys of the neighbourhood had chosen it as a board for the practice of handwriting, and for demonstrations in artless arithmetic. But Perceval saw nothing of this misery. His mouth was dry, and his voice hoarse with excitement.

The door was opened by a gaunt old man, whose tail-coat had not seen the day for years, as its creases displayed. Without a word he let us in, staring doubtfully at me. We traversed an unromantic passage, mounted a flight of naked stairs, and crossed a very long room, filled with machines and instruments, like a deserted factory. A steam-engine occupied one corner, and overhead hung a score of wheels, bands, cranks, shafts, I know not what. The dust of years crossed everything, and the metal was coated with rust. A room as large opened in this. Along the wall, facing the windows, rested an enormous magnet, three or four feet high as it lay on the broad side, with a gigantic battery between its feet. Other instruments of science, mostly of unusual

size, lumbered the apartment, leaving scarcely room to pass before the windows. Glancing out through their grimy panes, I perceived that each of these long chambers filled the whole width of an opposite house, the party walls having been removed. Nor had we yet reached the limits of Mr. Hopkins's dwelling, for the servant took us on through another door, and left us in a small apartment furnished scantily in old velvet and brocade. His master occupied all those houses which we had thought empty. The scientific instruments, the old servant, and the *mise en scène* in general were excellent. But Perceval was too much excited for comment, and I myself felt a thrill of expectancy.

After a moment's silent waiting, another door opened. Perceval caught his breath sobbingly, but the door closed in emptiness. Presently the old man entered again, and in tones scarcely intelligible mumbled to me to withdraw. Perceval feverishly urged his request, and I obeyed, of course. The longest ten minutes of my life I passed in that dusty and cobwebbed museum outside. I tried to talk with the old servant, who mounted guard over the door; but his few words were lost within his gums. No sound of voices reached us, but I saw that my companion was listening. After ten minutes he motioned me to follow, and we re-entered the small chamber.

White as the dead, Perceval sat in a large arm-chair, with the look of one who has suffered some terrible operation. Beside him stood a small man, ill-dressed in clothes which looked new, though cut in the style of a generation since. An iron-grey beard covered half his face, more white than even Perceval's—the face of one who never feels the air. Eyes prominent, bright, and singularly youthful, looked at me from beneath shaggy brows. It has been remarked that I am not superstitious nor impressionable. But I felt that this man saw what others cannot see; that my soul was laying itself out before him, answering questions which I did not hear. It is difficult to explain my sensation. Perhaps a reader will understand it best by the admission that I was not master of my own mind so long as those eyes were fixed on me. The perception made me suddenly faint, and I sat down. Mr. Hopkins also seated himself and spoke without any formal introduction; I appeared to feel that more was required. The old magician had a pleasant voice, but he talked with a certain slowness, as if unused to converse. 'Our business is almost done, Mr. B.,' he said. 'My young relation acknowledges the marriage of Francesca, and restores the estate of which her child, my mother, was wronged. He will have wealth enough left. In return I guarantee him pleasant dreams. It was your quick wit,

as I am informed, which brought about the result, and I thank you. In truth,' he added, with a smile, 'I was almost getting angry when you came to the rescue.'

I was astounded. This strange man spoke of his supernatural doings as coolly and frankly as others might talk of a successful lawsuit. Not knowing what to answer, I murmured, 'You lead a lonely life here, Mr. Hopkins?'

'You are the first strangers who have crossed the threshold for a generation. *Herclé!* That must be my excuse for neglecting the duties of a host. I have some old wine somewhere. Will you come into my living-rooms?'

We rose to follow him, when Perceval caught sight of a small painting which hung in a dusky corner. He stepped towards it, and stood at gaze, whispering breathlessly, 'Who is that? Who is that?'

'That,' answered Mr. Hopkins, 'is Francesca Perceval. Have you seen another portrait of her?'

'Don't mock me, sir! I have seen the original daily and nightly for six years. But she is older here, her expression different, and her dress—but the attitude is the same. Tell me, sir, is there another portrait of Francesca existing?'

'Yes,' he answered, smiling, 'there is another.'

'Younger, more winning, with a laugh in her eyes, and a question on her lips?'

'Perhaps you might describe it so,' replied Hopkins, looking at him fixedly.

'May I see it? I would buy it or beg it of you.'

'I am sorry to refuse. Come; the wine is waiting.'

We went out into the museum, and I said, 'You appear to have made all sciences your study.'

'When I was young I fell rather mad over these things. My fancy was, as you observe, to build machinery on a gigantic scale, expecting to produce results proportionate. It is well,' he added, laughing, 'that the whim passed when it did. If I had given life to that magnet, all the street would have tumbled to ruin. Youthful enthusiasm is apt to be destructive. These instruments give excellent training to the mind, but we should use them only for education.'

'Surely,' I said, stopping, 'scientific discovery is an object in itself to increase man's happiness and power.'

'I know nothing of man's happiness if it be not power, and these things are a cumbrous means of attaining to it. The savage ultimately gets his canoe, but he spends a lifetime in burning out the log.'

'Is there, then, a science beyond that which machines and processes display?'

'Machines and processes are objective, and the subjective is always superior. These things are useful as leading one to the higher train of study. When a student perceives the goal, he leaves such cumbrous vehicles behind him.'

'And what is the subjective method?'

'The assault of nature from inside.'

'Necromancy, in short?'

'No; for there is neither authority nor power in man over things dead!'

'Then how,' Perceval broke in suddenly, 'how have you haunted me all these years with the image of Francesca?'

'Nay, my young friend,' he laughed. 'There are no patent rights in my science, but there may be secrets.'

By this time we had reached the stairs, up which the old servant was clambering with a dusty bottle. Mr. Hopkins stopped to speak to him, calling out, 'Go round the landing.' We thus entered a fourth house. Upon a word from our host, Perceval, who went foremost, opened a door opposite—and fell back upon me with a cry. Standing just behind him, I also looked into the room. There sat the figure of his visions, so often described—a fair-haired, dark-eyed girl at a piano, glancing over her shoulder at the intruders. The expression was wondering amusement, as though she had heard footsteps approaching, and stopped in surprise, her fingers on the keys.

Perceval leaned in my arms, his mouth dropped, and eyes astart. The day's emotions had overcome him. Frightened, as she well might be, if flesh and blood, the girl sprang up, calling 'Father!' Mr. Hopkins pushed roughly by us in the doorway, exclaiming with passion, 'How came you here?'

'Who are these men, father?' she replied, breathlessly. 'Who is that?' indicating Perceval. 'I have seen him a thousand times in my dream, you know—that which haunts me. Who is he? What *does* it mean, father?'

'How did you come in?' asked Mr. Hopkins absently. His eyes turned from Perceval to his daughter with such keen and concentrated inquiry that I almost fancied that I could see the electric current passing between their souls and his.

'But a moment since,' the girl answered faintly. 'Jacques was not below. Explain to me, dear father?'

'There is no need. This is your kinsman Perceval, who surrenders to us our fortune. Go, sirs. This unexpected scene agitates us all.'

‘I shall see you again!’ muttered Perceval, his eyes fixed on the daughter, who was sobbing hysterically.

‘Yes, you shall see us again. What must be, will be. I thought to rule things into my plan, but Fate mocks me. By the very means of my success I am undone. You will see us again.’ And so we left.

I may spare reflections. Perceval forgot six years of persecution at sight of his dream-maiden in the flesh. It was I who wished to discuss these strange events, and he who shirked explanation. On the other hand, he could not exhaust himself on the charm and merits of the necromancer’s daughter, who seemed to me a very nice and pretty girl like many others of our acquaintance. The reader must think out for himself the secret of Mr. Hopkins’s doings, since Perceval declined to talk of them for ever after, and I have not yet found time to go into the subject thoroughly. As has been said, supernatural things do not interest me much, and after a time I ceased to speculate about this matter. The catastrophe turned to such commonplace happiness. Within a few days Perceval obtained the young lady’s address from her father; within four months they were married. Mr. Hopkins did not pretend to approve, but he took no hostile steps. The result, as he told his daughter, was clearly foreseen, if these two should meet, and he had intended they should never see each other in the flesh. When Perceval and his pretty *fiancée* came to exchange confidences, it appears that she also had been haunted by his face, with no awful accompaniments, however. Of the music and the spectres she knew nothing.

When the legal business was finished, which transferred to Mr. Hopkins the property he claimed, Perceval beheld him no more. He returned to the pursuit of his unholy science, and closed his doors. I myself tried to get admittance, and failed. His daughter sees him once or twice a year, and reports that the old man is as bright, as obstinate as ever, a charming companion, yet awful. Of late there has been a slight alarm in my friend’s household. His eldest son has reached the age of four, and grandpapa in Soho begins to hint that scientific education cannot be attacked too early. Meanwhile he keeps the property, and the fine old house near B——, for ‘his ghosts to play in,’ as Perceval says bitterly.

FREDERICK BOYLE.

## The Doom of Thormansby.

BOLD he was and stark beside,  
 A proper man to see ;  
 Was many a maid that longed and sighed  
 For the Lord of Thormansby.

Ever he was the last at feast,  
 Ever the first at fray ;  
 But, passing him, the grey-haired priest  
 Would veil his eyes and pray.

The maidens strove for smile or glance,  
 But children stayed their glee,  
 And old wives muttered and looked a-slance  
 At sight of Thormansby.

All on a Whitsun Eve it fell,  
 Betwixt the day and gloaming,  
 That up the glen by the Warlock's Well  
 Went Thormansby a-roaming.

The trees they whispered to the wind,  
 The waters wailing lowly,  
 And fate came following swift behind  
 Where he went strolling slowly.

His teeth were set, his brows were knit,  
 And fixed were both his e'en ;  
 He shuddered and moaned, as in ague fit,  
 And wrung his hands between.

All as he goes thus piteously,  
 A voice rings through the cover,  
 ' Now welcome, Lord of Thormansby !  
 Well met, thou faithful lover ! '

Full short he stayed, and hand on sword  
 Clapped, gazing where before him  
 A lady stood on greenwood sward,  
 And the night-sky darkened o'er him.

But spectral light, all blue and bright,  
 Around that dame was shedding,  
 And fair she showed in vest of white  
 That bride might wear for wedding.

What ails the Lord of Thormansby  
At sight of that lady fair?  
Why chatter his teeth, why fails each knee,  
And whence that stifled prayer?

And she laughed out, 'Leave priests to pray!  
Come, kiss me, my sworn lover!  
Oh, long have I looked for this merry day,  
But watching is past and over!

I have a snug and a secret cell —  
Is room for two, no more—  
Full six feet long and wide an ell,  
With cool and earthen floor,

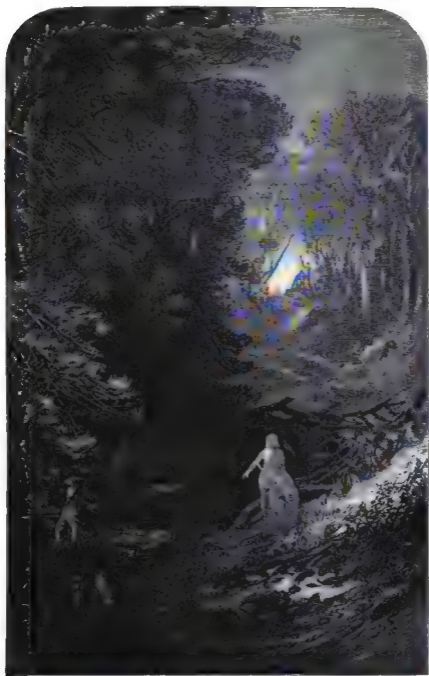
'Tis roofed above with the good red earth,  
But no grass grows thereon;  
And the ravens shall make us merry mirth,  
And corpse-lights glimmer wan.

So shall be music, and light thereto,  
And a welcoming passing-bell,  
To greet who comes to his bride anew  
By the brink of the Warlock's Well.'

There's hue and cry in Thormansby  
At earliest break of day,  
And groom and page seek low and high  
For the lord that's reft away.

And some sought high and some sought low,  
But they found him where he fell,  
Stiff and stark, where the waters flow  
By the brink of the Warlock's Well.

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.



*' Well met, thou faithful lover !'*

## An Enigma.

### MY FIRST.

It is not generally known that I made a false start in life as an artist. When I was fourteen, my kind friends predicted of me that I should rise superior to all the great painters of my time, and become President of the Royal Academy, and a Baronet, before my beard was grey. Before a beard of any colour appeared I made up my mind that another sort of drawing was better adapted to my talents, and more likely to butter my bread.

My father was a country attorney, and had the best sort of practice in that line. He was clerk to the Board of Guardians, clerk to the magistrates, clerk to the Highway Commissioners, and agent for some of the biggest estates in the country. 'The boy will be a fool if he throws up a good ready-made business to daub pictures which no one will buy,' was his uncomplimentary remark, when it was proposed that I should be sent to study Art under Mr. Maulstick. But he was wise enough to let me have my way. I went to London to take what in my conceit I called *finishing lessons* under that then famous Art Tutor, and very soon found that I had yet to begin my studies. I gained the friendship of a man who was a true artist, and his struggles and disappointments showed me what mine, without a tithe of his talent, were likely to be. I went to be a Turner, an Etty, and a Landseer rolled into one, and I remained to qualify as a country attorney, and draw conveyances instead of pictures.

I put up at a boarding-house in the vicinity of Fitzroy Square, much affected by art students; and there made the acquaintance of Mark Steadman, the friend I have just mentioned, and for his sake I remained there long after I had given up painting. I liked, and still like, art and the society of artists. We were made tolerably comfortable, allowed to do pretty much as we pleased, and there was a dash of Bohemianism about it which contrasted pleasantly with the dull routine of an attorney's office, and suited me.

Towards the end of my second year our circle was embellished by the presence of a lady. Ladies were not admitted, as a rule; but several rooms became vacant, times were bad, and as this applicant was an artist, an exception was made in her favour. She was a widow, accompanied by her father, who had been a Major

in the army, and was, when we first made his acquaintance, a gentleman in the forties with a bad digestion and several grievances. He had a grievance against the commander-in-chief for having him placed on half-pay, a grievance against the India Office about some prize money, a grievance with all his family arising out of his father's will, and a grievance against Providence upon general principles. He was the writing-grievance bore—not the spouting or visiting one. He wrote long and, as he said, unanswerable (they were certainly unanswered) letters to his various oppressors, and kept copies of them which he would read till he knew them by heart; but the idea of putting his shoulder to any sort of wheel never occurred to him. He spent his half-pay on himself, and smiled at his daughter's endeavours to coin her art. His name was Frederick Harrison Berry—that of his daughter, Ocna Wenlock. They occupied apartments of their own, and took no notice of us, until we—piqued, I fancy, by the lady's indifference—sought her, conquered her reserve, and eventually made her the Queen of our little colony, and spoiled her to the top of any pretty woman's bent.

She was a *very* pretty woman—small, fair, bright; with a low voice that thrilled, and pleading eyes. No, I did not fall in love with her—that was for Mark to do—but to my great annoyance I discovered (or thought I had, which came to the same thing) that she was daily showing a more and more marked preference for me. Well, I admit there was somebody else whose influence neutralised the power of those lustrous eyes; and there was Mark. Mark loved the very dust that clung to the hem of her skirt, and it was hard lines for him—poor fellow!—to be slighted and snubbed and to see what seemed to be a dead set made at me.

Don't misunderstand this. There was nothing indelicate in her conduct, or even unwomanly; little that even one of her own sex could have detected and taken exception at. You must not think me ungallant either, when I say that I can liken her behaviour towards me to nothing more exact than the conduct of an affectionate dog towards a kind master; for I think that many of us have a good deal to learn in the matter of truth and loyalty from dogs. I have seen a spaniel watch his master with eyes which seemed to say, 'What can I do to please you? ah! *do* let me know!' I have seen the same gentle eyes flash with fury at a fancied affront to him. There was much of this curious mixture of abject worship and daring about Ocna Wenlock; and as I am now on the shady side of fifty, and know what I am about to relate, I can afford to say so, I hope, without being mistaken for a coxcomb or a cad. After this you will be surprised to hear that she

was no more in love with me than I was with her ; but this I had to find out later on.

They say that Love is blind. Never was there a greater mistake. There are a few things at which he winks, but for thousands of others he is argus-eyed, and every orb is microscopic. Mark's love-lit eyes saw, and magnified what they saw, and his heart was grieved. Of all humours, a man's jealousy is the most difficult to deal with ; especially if he be your friend. If I were merry with Mark Steadman, he thought I was elated with my *bonne fortune*, and became savage. If I were glum, he put it down to a troubled conscience. If I had told him candidly—'This woman you think so much of is making love to *me*, and I don't like it,' there would have been a row, of course. I was not at liberty just then to make known to any one my engagement to the lady who afterwards became my wife. To make matters worse, all the other fellows took it for granted that I was Mrs. Wenlock's accepted lover, and occupied themselves by making disparaging remarks about me in her presence for the fun of seeing her flash out in my defence. Why didn't I get leave to tell her in confidence that I was an engaged man? Vastly fine! Perfect candour between engaged people is a lovely thing, I know ; but you write to your *fiancée* that another girl is making love to you, and see what you'll get.

At last I became desperate, and resolved to do two things which sound ugly, but which were really the kindest and the best to be done under the circumstances. I resolved to run away and to break my word.

I had cause at the time to remember what passed in Ocna Wenlock's room the day when that resolution was carried into effect.

Subsequent events brought out every detail with intense vividness. Nearly thirty years have passed, but I can shut my eyes and see her standing before the fire—one little foot, delicately slippered, on the fender rail ; and one pretty white hand spread to shield her face from the blaze—as she listened to what I was prepared to find treated as cruel and cutting words.

I began by telling her, abruptly, that I had come to wish her good-bye, as I was going away 'to-morrow.' I expected that she would start, and demand 'Why?' but she only asked almost under her breath—'Where?' This was a relief, as it brought me straight to my benignant breach of faith.

'I am going on a visit to the family of the lady to whom I am engaged,' I said, and braced myself up for an explosion.

'Why did you not tell me long ago,' she replied quite calmly, 'that you were engaged?'

‘Because I was not at liberty to do so—I ought not to tell you now.’

‘Then, why do you?’ she asked, looking me full in the face with a smile that would have melted an (unengaged) anchorite.

I expected either tears or anger at this point, and one or the other would have struck the key for the semi-brotherly ‘arrangement’ I had prepared.

‘Why do I?’ I stammered; ‘why, because—because—I really don’t know why I do so. Perhaps I thought you’d take some interest in it.’ I felt small, and I spoke spitefully

‘I do take great interest in you,’ she replied. ‘Do you not feel that I do?’

‘You are always very kind.’

‘*Kind!* Kind is not the word,’ she retorted, with the first sign of annoyance. ‘Would you like the girl you were going to marry, to say of you that you were always very kind to her?’ ‘There is nothing in the world that I would not do for you,’ she added in her usual low sweet voice; thus luckily (for me) letting her excessively inconvenient question pass unanswered; and giving me just the one I wanted.

‘You could do me a great *kindness*, I was going to say, but checked myself just in time and substituted ‘favour, if you would not be so hard upon Mark Steadman. Don’t you know that he loves you?’

‘Yes,’ she said dreamily, ‘he loves me.’

‘And he is such a good, dear, true fellow,’ I went on, warming up. ‘If you were my own sister, I would not wish a better husband for you.’

‘Ay, but you ought to wish a better wife for him,’ she replied. ‘I am pretty, but I am not good or true.’ She spoke as calmly as though it had been, I am not cold or hungry. ‘My name,’ she continued, ‘is not Wenlock, and I am not a widow. It is so hard for a girl to go about and do anything. As an unmarried woman I could not have got in here, don’t you see? Papa is so helpless; I must make a living for both.’ Here she seated herself and substituted a fan for the hand which had served as a fire-screen. ‘We have some troublesome law business,’ she continued, ‘which drags along disgracefully slowly. When this is settled, we shall be comfortably off; but in the mean time we must have bread, and I must earn it. No one will listen to a girl who talks about earning money, or will believe that she is in earnest. Are you very shocked? I never intended to tell this to any one, but I must tell you. Oh, please don’t look so grave. If I have done wrong, I had no one to advise me rightly. You know what papa is. I am all alone—all alone.’

‘Then why,’ I demanded, ‘do you snub a fine honest fellow like Mark, who asks for no greater happiness than to work for you and be your lawful protector?’

‘He is your friend, and I am not good,’ she answered as deliberately as before. ‘I cannot see harm in things which you and Mark and every one know are bad. If a man has money which he does not want, and would not be hurt by losing; and I do want it, and would be saved from hurt by having it—I cannot see that it would be wrong to take it. I can only feel that it would be horrid to be sent to prison for taking it, and that is the only reason why I should refrain from stealing if I had the chance.’

There was a half-innocent, half-comical expression on her face which disarmed serious criticism. ‘My dear Mrs. Wenlock,’ I replied, ‘did you ever know any one who had anything valuable that they did not want? The very richest want something more than they have, and I suppose there is no one so poor but he has what somebody envies him.’

‘I once read,’ she continued, as though following her own thoughts, ‘of a country in which, when people were old and their lives were useless, they were treated as if they were dead.’

‘Gulliver’s Voyage to Laputa,’ I cut in. ‘Would you like to have your dresses made by trigonometrical observations?’

‘If there were a man who did not enjoy his own life, and made other people’s hateful,’ she continued, still in the same tone, ‘absolutely hateful—and they killed him—you would call that murder—I don’t.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Wenlock!’

‘That is it! you’re horrified. Mr. Steadman would be horrified if he knew. Don’t you see that I am not good?’

‘I see that you are trying to make yourself out very foolish,’ I replied with vexation; ‘you know you don’t mean one word of this—this wicked nonsense.’

‘I do,’ she answered, turning her pretty little foot round coquettishly on the heel.

‘Look me in the face, Mrs. Wenlock,’—I spoke sternly now,—‘and say that again.’

She started from her seat with a cry of sudden pain; sprang to the other end of the room, and thrust out her arms as though to repel me.

‘No—no—no!’ she almost screamed, ‘not that. Leave me alone. You must not press me so hard. Oh, have some pity! Can you not understand? Will you not see?’ Then she began to sob hysterically.

If you had offered me a hundred pounds a minute for life, I could not understand; and try my best, I could not see what I had done to provoke this outburst.

It had one good effect, however; it changed the subject.

‘Tell me,’ she said, when she had somewhat recovered, ‘about this lady you are going to marry. Is she pretty?’

I showed her Nora’s miniature, which I wore in a locket, and bade her judge for herself.

‘A sweet face—a *good* face,’ she mused.

‘Are you very much in love; both of you?’

‘I hope so,’ I said; ‘I can answer for myself.’

‘You wouldn’t marry a girl that didn’t love you?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘Then, why do you want me to marry Mark Steadman?’

‘Because I am sure you would love him if you would only give him a chance to show you what a dear, true-hearted fellow he is.’

‘You said just now that I was hard upon him—how so?’

‘Well, you are so cold—careless, and I must add, Mrs. Wenlock, that you are sometimes even rude.’

‘I will try and behave better when you are gone. I have no thoughts for any one else when you are here,’ she said, looking me full in the face. The woman was a Sphinx!

‘Let me be perfectly candid with you, Mrs. Wen——’

‘Call me Ocna now,’ she interrupted; ‘that is real.’

‘Mark and I were bosom friends until you—Well, I don’t like to say.’

‘Go on.’

‘Never mind the why and wherefore. Day by day our friendship is cooling. We shall have a downright quarrel some day, soon.’

‘About me?’

‘About you.’

‘Ridiculous! I wish I were in love with you—that would not be so bad.’

How an unmarried woman could catch my meaning and refute it without a blush was only one of the conundrums which Ocna’s behaviour to me that day presented. She ended by promising to be good to Mark for my sake, and somehow it never occurred to me that I was not doing him a service in thus aiding his suit to a girl who passed herself off as a widow, who admitted she would steal but for fear of a gaol, and did not consider the killing of troublesome old people to be murder. Of course, I did not broach the subject to him, and must admit that my own head was anything but clear upon it. What could she mean by wishing she

were in love with me, and adding, 'that would not be so bad' ?--so bad as what ?

### MY SECOND.

I PACKED up my traps and started for the country in that frame of mind which belongs to a man who has escaped a scene and outflanked an explanation—a happy frame of mind, but one which I am afraid will not bear analysis. When I reflect that my satisfaction progressed with my packing up, and increased as the rate of my movements became accelerated—marching, so to speak, at slow time as I slunk down stairs, at quick step in the hansom which took me to the station, and breaking into the 'double' as the train gave its last preliminary snort and started—I must admit that there was nothing heroic about it. I was like one who had gone to the dentist to have a tooth out, and got off with a slight lancing of the gum; but for a time I was full of self-admiration for the excellent manner in which I had managed a delicate affair, and of rejoicing over the result. In less than two hours I reached my destination. Nora was on the platform to meet me, and drove me home in her pony carriage. From that moment I had no time to think of other folks' love affairs.

On the fourth day I received a telegram from Mark, which ran thus: 'Wish me joy; Ocna consents. I know all. God bless you. Will write.'

This had, of course, to be explained. Telegrams were rare in those days. An engaged man cannot receive one in a country house and keep its contents to himself; and an engaged girl is full of pretty curiosity about another woman who has just assumed the golden chain. Nora had heard a good deal about Mark. I had now to make her more than equally well acquainted with Ocna, and to explain why I had never mentioned her in any of my letters. Engaged girls do not like to hear all of a sudden that a very pretty woman has been living under the same roof with their adorer, and seeing him every day for months and months, without their knowledge. Some of the truth, however, was enough to put this straight. I told her I was not in the habit of thinking, and therefore did not write, about other women; and had I not made this match? 'I know all. God bless you!' meant, 'I know that you have pleaded my cause—God bless you for doing so.' There was no necessity to tell her of the mistake I had made with regard to Ocna's feelings towards me, or to betray her secrets.

Thinking it over by myself, I adhered to this reading of the message. If it had ended with 'I know all,' I should have concluded that Ocna had confessed all that she had told me; but

the concluding words seemed to limit his meaning, and make it refer only to what I had done. I should have felt much more comfortable if I could have thought otherwise. Well, I should get his letter in the morning, and that would explain.

There was a family dinner party that day, given to celebrate Nora's engagement, and present me to her cousins and her uncles and her aunts. Younger branches and some girl friends came in the evening, and there was a dance. It was nearly two o'clock before I went to bed, and I am quite sure that I had not thought of Mark or Ocna, or anything relating to them, for at least eight hours. My mind was full of Nora, and of my future happiness with her. My slumber should have been soft, and my dreams pleasant. I had not taken anything for supper which was likely to lay the keel of a nightmare in digestive organs twenty-two years old, and yet something unpleasantly like one came upon me with my first sleep.

I was in a room as different from that in which I had gone to bed as it was possible for two rooms to be. The floor was of red brick, the ceiling low and crossed by five huge oak beams. On my right hand, as I stood facing the door—through which, by the by, I did not seem to have entered—was a large oriel window, glazed with small triangular pieces of greenish glass set in lead. Opposite to this was the fireplace—a cavernous recess, flanked with seats, and containing a broken lawn-mower and a pair of rusty iron 'dogs.' Three steps led up to the door (showing that the room must be lower than the rest of the house), and built into the wall on each side of it were four wide oaken presses, two to the right and two to the left, which filled up the rest of that side. The fourth side was a plain whitewashed space. The furniture consisted of one chair, a small mahogany three-legged table, and a very old-fashioned turn-up bedstead. Waking: I know that I had never been in such a room, nor can I remember ever having seen anything like it in a picture, or having read a description of any place resembling it. Dreaming: I felt no surprise at being there, although the bed was occupied. Gradually I began to understand that the occupant of the bed was the lady I had known as Ocna Wenlock, and yet it did not strike me that I was intruding. On the contrary, it seemed as though I had a right to be where I was, *because* the room was hers.

Understand me. I did not see her. There was no necessity for me to look in her direction, to know that she was present. I took no more interest in her than in the broken mowing-machine, or the three-legged table, or anything else which had been taken in by my first glance round the room. I *felt* that she was there,

that she knew I was there, and that we should not come into personal contact, however long the dream might last. I also felt that there was something in the room which was to have a powerful effect upon me; and as I looked around under this impression, my eyes became fixed and my mind fascinated by the closed doors of the second press on the left-hand side of the doorway.

Now, there were eight sets of doors; one pair as much like the rest as similarity of material, colour, and workmanship, toned down by use and age, could make them. There was no reason why I should stand in front of that particular press, and be, as I have said, fascinated by it. I had no fear that the closed doors hid anything horrible, so that when they slowly parted, and swung back to their full extent, I was not startled. The movement appeared to answer my wish to know what was inside.

There was nothing extraordinary inside: only some gardening tools, a set of bowls, and three or four old-time cricket bats on the lower and wider shelves. Higher up I saw a net and fishing tackle, a game bag, and a machine for filling cartridges. Higher up still, on the easiest level to get at, were a lot of farriers' instruments for shoeing, bleeding, and dosing horses, several books on Veterinary Surgery, and a few gallipots and bottles—nothing more. The upper shelves were empty. There was absolutely nothing to inspire fear or horror; but yet, whilst the thought—'Well, if there *be* a surprise in store for me, it isn't there,' was forming in my mind, an indescribable sensation of horror and of fear began to creep over me. I felt that I must shut those doors, or I would be overpowered by an influence full of agony, terror, and death, which seemed to be pouring forth from between them, and growing stronger and stronger. But I could not move. Nightmares are common enough, I suppose, and every one who has had one knows what I suffered in the vain attempt to get at those doors and close them. When I awoke, I found myself sitting up in bed bathed in perspiration, with a throat as dry as a lime-kiln, and feeling as though I had run a mile at the top of my speed.

The morning's post brought me letters from Mark and Ocna. The former I read to Nora, the latter I kept to myself, for it was as follows:

Dear Friend,—Mark knows that I am not a widow, and isn't angry. I think he's glad. He was terribly jealous of you, but that is now at an end. I think I shall love him. I want you to wish with all your heart that I shall. Pray do not repeat to any one what passed during our last conversation. I shall lose those ideas when I have a good man for my husband. Mark wants to be married as soon as possible, and I have no objection. Do not think me unkind if I say that I would rather not see you again until we are married, and beg that you will make some excuse not to be present at our wedding.

Yours, OCNA.

In Mark's letter he told me that he wanted to be married at once, but Ocna insisted on three weeks' delay. He concluded by begging me to let no engagement stand in the way of my being his best man.

What was I to think? What was I to do? Did this sphinx of a woman love me, after all, and fear that my presence would influence her against Mark? If so, how could she ask me to wish with all my heart that she should love him?

I remained a week with Nora's family, and then went home to prepare for her promised visit to mine. Our railway was not in existence in those days. I had to go to Bristol by the Great Western, take the steamboat to Swansea, and thence had a six-miles' drive to reach my destination. The servant in charge of the dog-cart had been for years in our service, and of course I got into conversation with him. How were they all at home? and so on; and what was the news? Well, there was no news in particular, as of course I had heard of the murder. I had not heard of any murder in our parts and, wanted to be told all about it. My informant was one of those tiresome people who plunge into the middle of a story with the assumption that you know all the antecedents. I think he commenced thus: 'Well, you see, she poisoned him with corrosive sublimate in his beer;' and was vexed when I asked who 'he' was, and who 'she' was, and when and where? However, I got at all he knew by degrees; and this was the result. An old and exceedingly disreputable person, named Tanner, lived in a tumble-down house attached to an extinct copper mine on the outskirts of Swansea, and about seven miles from where we lived, and had lately been waited upon by a niece to whom he had given a home out of charity (the only kind thing, I suppose, he ever did) upon the death of her father. She was young, pretty, vain, and not particularly steady; as it appeared that she had run away from home with a circus company when she was fifteen. Her home had been at Leamington, where her father kept a livery stable, and let her do pretty much what she pleased. If a gay place like Leamington did not content her, it was only natural that she should not enjoy life in a lonely Welsh hotel, in company with a man who got drunk regularly every night, and threw whatever he could reach at her head every morning of his life. She did not run away this time, but got some corrosive sublimate; put a teaspoonful of it in old Tanner's beer, and sobered him for ever. Then she packed up her things, took two hundred and seventy sovereigns which he kept hid in an old stocking, and ran away. The case, as put by my informant, was a very clear one, and, he added, 'she'll be hung, sure.'

I have said that my father held, among other offices, that of clerk to the county justices. In this capacity he had to prepare the indictments upon which prisoners were tried at the assizes, and instruct counsel for the prosecution. As soon as home-talk was exhausted, I naturally asked about the murder. 'Come to the office to-morrow,' said my father, 'and I'll show you the depositions.'

'When I am for the prosecution,' he began, 'I think over the case as though I were for the defence; and *vice versâ*. That's the way to find out the weak places and stop up the holes. Now, then. Two heads are better than one. Listen, and see what reasons you could give a jury to find Elizabeth Tanner not guilty of murdering her uncle.'

'Robert Tanner died from the effects of corrosive sublimate, mixed in his beer, on the 19th of last December. Enough of the poison was found in his stomach to kill five men, and as much more remained in the bottom of the beer pot. His niece and servant, Elizabeth, was the only person in the house with him, and as soon as the doctor said the word 'poison' she ran away, taking all she could find of the old man's money with her. This seems to twist a powerful strand of the rope—don't it? Well, there are facts which untwist it a little. The old man not only had a lock tap to his beer barrel, but locked up the cellar in which it was kept. There is nothing to show that Elizabeth had any key. When the poison began to work, she ran all the way into Swansea for a doctor; and when he asked what Tanner had been eating or drinking last, she gave him the pot with half a pint of liquor still in it, and, as I have said, enough poison in *that* to kill five men. If she is a murderess, she is a great fool, but there is nothing out-of-the-way in that. Murderers always do stupid things. She ought to have thrown away that beer, and washed out the pot.'

'According to the medical evidence, he must have taken the poison about six o'clock in the evening, the time when he usually began to get fuddled. Was Elizabeth in the house then? No. She was at the cottage of a Mrs. Thomas, more than half a mile away, from four o'clock till seven; when she returned and found the deceased rolling on the floor in agony. Now for a twist the other way.'

'The only articulate words which the dying man uttered were, "Damn her! damn her! This is her work; damn her!" The pot from which he drank was not locked up. The passage-way in which it was kept was dark, the beer cellar was dark. Poison might easily have been thrown into the empty pot, and remained

there unnoticed when he drew his beer into it. She might have left the house for the purpose of being out of the way, if by chance her scheme should fail.

‘Where did the poison come from? Ah! that bothered us all for a long time. Inquiries were made of every chemist and druggist for miles round, and also at Leamington; but in vain. No one had sold a woman such a quantity of crude corrosive sublimate. At last, by sheer accident, in clearing out a dry ditch near the cottage of that very Mrs. Thomas, an empty bottle was found, bearing a label on which was printed, “Poison. *Hydrarg. Bichlorid.* Hayes, Chemist and Druggist, Hereford.” Hayes identified it, and proved that it originally contained two ounces of corrosive sublimate, which he had sold to a farmer named Killick, who lives near Llandilo, and is a sort of hedge veterinary surgeon. Killick admits having bought it, and taken it home to make a wash for killing ticks in sheep (for which purpose he used about a third of the stuff), but he could not for the life of him account for the bottle being found empty in a ditch twenty-seven miles away from his house; until——now comes the most extraordinary part of the case. On the evening of the 3rd of August last year, Warren’s stage coach was upset and the driver killed, close to Killick’s house, which is on the high road from Hereford. Miss Elizabeth Tanner was one of the passengers on her way to her uncle——now do you see?—and with the rest of them, nine altogether, she was entertained that night by Killick.’

‘So that she had the opportunity of taking the bottle!’ I suggested.

‘So that she did actually take the bottle,’ my father resumed, ‘if we are to believe the evidence which I will now read. Never mind the preliminaries. The witness is the only female passenger, and she deposes as follows:

“I have spent the most part of my life in India with my father, who is an officer in the army. We have no regular home in England, but have occupied lodgings in various places. We were at Cheltenham for some time. I remember the 3rd of August; we were making a tour in South Wales. The coach in which we were travelling upset, and we spent the night at Mr. Killick’s house. The prisoner was one of the passengers. I did not know her. I had never seen her before. It was at first arranged that we were to sleep together; but I have always had a room to myself, and begged for any sort of accommodation so that I could be alone. I think the prisoner was offended at my not wishing to share her bed. She said some unkind things of me. I was accommodated in a sort of pantry. I was too much excited by the accident to

sleep ; besides, the bed was very uncomfortable. I do not know how long I lay awake. It must have been past midnight, when I was surprised by something. Some one came into the room with a lighted candle in her hand. It was the prisoner. She was dressed. I asked her what she wanted. She made no reply. I was frightened. I thought she had come to quarrel with me, and hid my face under the bedclothes for a while. After a little, not hearing anything, I looked up and saw that she had opened a cupboard, and was looking at some bottles on one of the shelves. She took down several, looked at them, and put them back again. At last she took down one, looked at it, and put it into her pocket. It was similar in size and shape to the one now produced." ['The bottle found in the ditch,' interpolated my father]. "I think there was a label on it. I could not read what was printed on the label. I cannot swear it was the same bottle, but only that it was very like it in all respects. The prisoner then left the room. I am quite sure it was she. I saw her face plainly."

*'Cross-examined.*—"I did not say anything to her as she left the room. I did not say anything but 'Who's that?' when she came in. I did not say anything when she took away the bottle. I did not tell any one the next morning that she had been in my room. I thought it strange that she should have come into my room and gone to the cupboard. I did not like to offend her, as she was very rude. I did not know that she was going to my uncle Tanner. I have already said that I did not know her. No one found me out as a witness. I came forward of my own accord, when I read about this case in the papers. I have never seen a person walk in her sleep. The deceased Mr. Tanner was my mother's brother. My father has not been on terms with him for years. I never saw him. I do not know how his property will go if the prisoner be convicted of murder.'"

'Now,' said my father, folding up the brief, 'what do you make of that?'

'Who defended the prisoner?' I asked.

'Lusher.'

'He is going to prove that she walks in her sleep?'

'Perhaps he will.'

'And he is going to break down your fine-young-lady witness till no ten words of her story will hold together. Just consider,' I went on, warming into my subject: 'these two women are both strangers in a strange house. How could Elizabeth Tanner possibly know that there was poison in that room? If she did know, is it reasonable to suppose she would take it whilst the other was looking at her? They had quarrelled, or at any rate Elizabeth had

said sharp things to her. Is it likely that she would not have taken her revenge by telling next morning? Would one woman trust another, whom she had offended, to hold her tongue under such circumstances? Not a bit of it! Would a truthful woman have held her tongue in such a case, under any circumstances? If Lusher can prove that the prisoner walks in her sleep, he can easily make out that she went to the witness's room, frightened her so that she did not know whether she was on her head or her heels, and that she either invented the bottle business, or dreamed it.'

'But the bottle was found near Mrs. Thomas's cottage.'

'Upon a public road, along which hundreds of people pass! And when? Long after the murder, and empty! How do you know that your fine-young-lady witness did not take it herself and throw it there? She has a motive. If she gets rid of her only cousin, she doubles her share out of old Tanner's money.'

'You're prejudiced against the witness.'

'I am,' I admitted; 'I don't know why, but I certainly am.'

'You wouldn't be if you saw her,' my father said with a smile. 'She is very good-looking, and gave her evidence before the magistrates modestly, and with great apparent truthfulness. I think, with you, that it can be shaken, but I believe every word of it.'

'Ah! you're prejudiced against the other girl.'

'My dear boy, who else could have poisoned Tanner?'

'He might have poisoned himself.'

'Now you are getting unreasonable. Remember his dying cry, "Damn her! This is her work; damn her!" He wasn't the sort of man to commit suicide.'

'Now then for another counter-twist. Grant that the prisoner got possession of Killick's bottle; let us come back to the question of administering the poison.'

'You said it might have been hidden in the empty pot,' I remarked.

'If so, he must have taken it in his *first* drink. Now, that quantity of corrosive sublimate would have given such an acrid taste to the beer, that any sober man would have detected something wrong before he had swallowed the second mouthful. The post-mortem examination shows that he had drunk more than a quart. Remember, there was a gill left in the pot he used—a pint one. According to the hid-in-the-pot theory, he must have drunk less than a pint, unless he used something else to drink out of; and no other pot, or cup, or glass, or mug, or anything of the sort, was found. But she ran away and stole his money: that twists it back again.'

‘Could she have given him the poison after she returned from Mrs. Thomas?’

‘No—impossible. She was seen to go into the house, and immediately afterwards called for help. The old man was dying then.’

‘Did he leave any will?’

‘Not he! He was afraid of its being known that he was rich.’

‘Rich! Two hundred and seventy sovereigns isn’t——’

‘That was only his ready money. The old rascal had mining shares and house property worth from sixteen to seventeen thousand pounds. There was plenty of motive for getting him out of the way. You had better come over with me and hear the case tried. Miss Elizabeth will be well defended. Lusher has retained Serjeant Raikes, and they are going to call evidence for the defence. That is why the trial was postponed from the last assizes.’

‘When will it come on?’

‘Early on Tuesday or Wednesday; and that reminds me that I’ve got to see Killick about getting a plan of his house. I shall drive over this afternoon. You can come too, if you like. By the by, you might make the drawing for me.’

I went with him; taking the necessary tackle. I was shown along a passage at the end of which was a door. I was told to mind, as there were three steps down. I had not reached the second, when I saw an oriel window, a cavernous fireplace, and a red-brick floor. Another step, and I was in the room of my dream!—in the room where that strange horror had overpowered me, flowing as it were from the great press on the left-hand side of the entrance—the very press from which the bottle of poison had been taken!

Then I asked the name of the witness who had passed the night there, and learned for the first time that it was Ocna Berry.

### MY THIRD.

‘Poon!’ exclaimed my father as he entered; ‘the place smells like a grave. Open the windows, Killick, won’t you? Why, Frank, you look as pale as a ghost.’

‘It’s the foul air,’ I stammered. ‘For God’s sake, come out of it, or we shall be choked.’

‘Oh, it’s not so bad as that,’ my father replied. ‘There, now! here comes the breeze. Leave the door open, and it will soon drive out the damp. What the deuce do you keep the place shut up for like this, Killick?’

Killick explained that he did so because he thought the gentle-

men—meaning the justices and the coroner—might come again to ‘rummage ;’ but from what I afterwards heard, it appeared that no one liked to enter the room with ‘them pisons and things’ about, lest they too should get into trouble. Being a witness in a criminal case was considered a sort of ‘trouble’ in our part of the country, and is so still.

The foul atmosphere was a godsend for me. It accounted for my agitation, and served as an excuse to hasten to the window whilst Killick and my father had their talk. I made my measurements, and drew my plan, which included a drawing of the press from which the poison had been taken, and upon which a lock had now been placed in consequence of some remarks made at the adjourned inquest. I will confess that my heart beat painfully fast when the key was turned, and the great doors opened before me for the second time.

Everything was there exactly as I had seen in my dream : the bowls, the bats, the instruments, the books, the gallipots, and the bottles. The places of some of these had been changed, but there they all were. I got rid of my father and Killick, on the plea that I wanted to make a sketch of the room, and could not do so with people talking around me. I dashed off what might pass for a drawing, and took up my real interest—to make a thorough search in and about that press. What did I think I should find ? I really did not think of finding anything ; I wanted to make myself familiar with it, so that it should not haunt me, as I feared it might do if I left it unexplored. In the first place, I wanted to see whether the doors would open of themselves if a shake or a gust of wind should slightly part them. I opened them a quarter of an inch, half an inch, an inch, and then they swung back by themselves, giving me another cold creepy sensation down the back. I searched every shelf from top to bottom, but found nothing to reward me for dusty hands and a broken brace. The room was now bare. The turn-up bedstead and three-legged table had been removed, but the broken lawn mower and the rusty pair of ‘dogs’ were still where I had seen them last. ‘Now,’ thought I, out of mere curiosity, ‘let me see what is in the other presses.’ I was standing by the fireplace when this idea came into my head, and walked towards the one at the entrance, on the right-hand side of the door. As I went my foot slipped, and I nearly fell. I looked down, and found that I had slipped on a drop of candle-grease. I examined the floor carefully, and found four others between the spot where stumbled and the door. Now, Ocna had sworn that Elizabeth Tanner came into the room with a candle. The room had had no occupant since the night she passed in it, and had been closed

since the 14th of January. Something might be made of those grease spots. I would ask Killick when the room had been scrubbed last, and if any one was in the habit of going there with a candle. I was on the second step, passing out, when it occurred to me to close and lock the press. You had to shut the right-hand flap first, and bolt it with a bolt that shot downwards into the framework; then you closed the other on the bevelled edge. I had some difficulty in forcing the bolt home; and as it is one of my peculiarities to put such things to rights if I can, I took my scarf pin and cleared out the hole.

There came out of that hole seven pieces of worsted—two black, two blue, and three white; partly woven together, and all the same length.

‘If Miss Elizabeth Tanner has a shawl with a black, blue, and white fringe,’ I said to myself, ‘and a bit of it is missing, all the Serjeant Raikeses in the world cannot save her neck.’

I thought it wise to keep this discovery to myself till I got home; but told my father then and there about the grease spots. We found that the room had been scrubbed out for Miss Berry when she insisted upon sleeping alone, and that no one went there at night with or without a candle. We got a bricklayer, took up the bricks on which the spots were, and carried them off with us as witnesses. ‘It’s a circumstance,’ said my father, as we drove along, ‘with not much in it of itself, but I give you great credit for finding it out.’

Then I told him what else I had discovered, and he exclaimed, ‘By Jove! Frank, you’ll do! I’ll have every rag that girl has examined. All her things are sealed up, and you shall overhaul them yourself. I’m so glad I brought you. If we find what you suspect, you’re a made man.’

We did find exactly what I suspected. Elizabeth Tanner had a worsted shawl—black, blue, and white. She wore it in the coach on the day of the upset, and precisely seven strands of the fringe at one corner were missing! She must have caught it on the bolt of the press as she shut the door.

‘Now, how about your prejudice against poor Miss Berry?’ my father asked triumphantly. And the somnambulism!’ he continued; ‘that won’t do either. You’ll have to attend the trial as an important witness now, young man, instead of a spectator.’

This set me thinking of Ocna and Mark. Their marriage was fixed for the 24th; the trial was to take place on the 18th. Would he come with her? If so, how was I to get off going back with them? I had written to him, saying that of course I would be his best man, meaning to excuse myself at the last moment. I

had congratulated Ocna, and told her to rely on my doing all she wished. I should have to see her in court, but that could not be helped. I thought it passing strange that she had never attended in any way to the murder of her uncle. Was this the troublesome law business of which she had spoken? As I reflected, I remembered that she had never spoken to me of my family or my home, and that I had told her I was going to visit my *fiancée*, without mentioning that I should proceed to Wales. 'How surprised she will be,' I thought, 'to find that I am also a witness in the case.'

By this time all my prejudice had vanished. The unnamed witness, whose story on paper I had picked to pieces, was an abstraction whom I had judged on abstract principles—Ocna Berry in the flesh was another, and quite another, individual.

It would be just like her to shrink from an altercation with an angry, bold woman like Elizabeth Tanner; just like her to ask no questions and tell no tales about a matter which might have no importance; just like her to come forward when its importance was manifest, to tell the truth for the truth's sake.

But how odd it was that these two women should be cousins, and not know each other! How odd it was again, that the theory of the one about putting disagreeable old people out of the way should have been carried out by the other! Nevertheless, I had got quite reconciled, as it were, to Ocna, when a letter from Mark threw me back into doubts and questionings.

'You will be sorry to hear,' he wrote, 'that my Ocna is far from well. I wrote to you yesterday, and took the letter to her to ask if she would not add a line. She went with it to her desk for that purpose, and had not walked three steps before she fell as though she had been shot. The poor dear girl passed from one fainting fit into another, and is unable to leave her room to-day. I am very anxious and unhappy about her. The worst of it is that she insists upon keeping an engagement she has made to go to Devonshire for a few days on the 16th, to visit some old aunt or other. Well or ill, she says she must go; and will not let me go with her. Her father backs her up in this insane resolve, and is exceedingly grumpy when I resist it. We almost quarrelled. Wait till Ocna and I are married, and I'll teach him a lesson or two. They will be back on the 22nd. Why cannot you come up at once, old man? it will be awfully lonely when she's away.'

So she had fainted at the sight of a letter addressed to me, and was trying to hide her attendance at the assizes for South Wales by a pretended visit to an aunt in Devonshire!

‘What folly!’ I thought. ‘Why, every newspaper in the country would have an account of such a trial.’

The trial came on as arranged; I had a seat next to my father in the well of the court, just under the Counsel for the Crown—Durham, Q.C., the leader of the Circuit, and Mr. Finch, a steady old ‘Junior’ who did all the heavy prosecutions. Mr. Durham’s opening speech was calm, close, deadly. The motive, the means to carry it out, the result, the death, the flight of the prisoner, were hammered together, link by link, with fatal precision. There seemed to be no weak place in the chain.

The first witness examined was the doctor whom the prisoner had called in, and who subsequently made the post-mortem examination.

Then farmer Killick proved having purchased the poison, and placed it in the press we know of; he told about the accident to the coach, and that the prisoner and the witness, Miss Berry, had passed the night at his house. He swore that the latter had worn a shawl similar to the one produced, and identified the bricks we had taken up.

Very little was made out of him in cross-examination, except that the prisoner was a stranger to him, and could not have known that he had poisons in the house. Then Mr. Finch rose and called ‘Ocna Berry.’

I had not yet seen her. The witness-box was within three yards of where I sat. Our eyes met as she entered it, but she made no sign of recognition. She was deadly pale, and trembled so that she could hardly draw off her glove. The prisoner, who had listened to the evidence so far in dogged silence, became violently excited, and exclaimed, ‘That woman! oh, that woman! she’ll swear my life away!’ Her eyes flashed, her bosom heaved, she struck her hand on the bar with such violence that the blood came. Then she fainted.

I do not know which was the calmer of the two during this outbreak—the Judge, or Ocna Berry.

I never saw her look so lovely. Her pallor became her, and added refinement and delicacy to her always sweet face. I was young, and susceptible to the influence of beauty. I began to hate myself for having doubted her story—strange as it was—and questioned the motives which led her to conceal her movements from Mark. Many people think it degrading to give evidence in a Court of Justice. She was foolish in thinking that she could deceive her lover—that was all. And yet I found myself saying to my own heart, *I hope to God she will tell the truth!* Now, if you

do not remember her statement, as read to me by my father, do me the favour to turn back and reperuse it.

In about a quarter of an hour the prisoner had recovered and was quiet again.

The case went on.

Having given her name, age, &c. &c., her examination proceeded thus :

Q. 'Do you remember the 3rd of last August?'

A. 'I do. The coach in which my father and I were travelling was upset, and we passed the night at Mr. Killick's house.'

Q. 'Was the prisoner one of your fellow-passengers?'

A. 'She was.'

Q. 'Had you ever seen her before?'

A. 'I had not; but from something she said on the coach, I knew she was my cousin.'

Q. 'In what room did you sleep?'

A. 'In a sort of pantry with a brick floor. They wanted me to sleep with the prisoner, but I had taken a dislike to her.'

Q. 'Well, I believe you were not very comfortable?'

A. 'Oh, I was so tired; that I could have slept anywhere.'

Mr. Finch referred to his brief; but was too old a hand to look puzzled. Serjeant Raikes made a note, and underscored it twice.

Q. 'Did anything disturb you during the night?'

A. 'Not until I had been to the cupboard.'

Q. 'I suppose you mean, not till the prisoner had?'

Up started the Serjeant. 'Stop, stop! I object,' he urged. 'Really, my Lord, such a suggestion is most improper.'

'You had better let the witness tell her story in her own way,' said the judge. 'Go on,' he added kindly to Ocna; 'take your time, and tell what happened in your own way.'

Her beauty attracted every eye. There was a peculiar ring in her voice—though it was low and sweet—which hushed every other sound. You could hear a pin drop as she proceeded.

'I went to sleep almost directly after I got into bed, but I woke up about one o'clock, and began to think about Uncle Tanner, how rich he was, and how horrid; and what a good thing it would be for us if I could kill him, and not be found out.'

I will not even try to describe the sensation this produced. The prisoner uttered a piercing cry, half laugh, half scream. Finch turned round and looked at his leader, aghast. The Serjeant was so excited that he could hardly take down the words.

'Are you trifling with the court,' asked the judge severely, 'or is it possible you have been—? Mr. Finch, is your witness sober?'

‘I am quite sober,’ Ocna replied for herself; ‘I must tell the truth. I know I have sworn falsely once before, but I must tell the truth to-day.’ There was no movement of surprise now. The court was as silent as a graveyard at midnight; you could hear the ticking of the clock: *I* could hear the beating of my heart. The judge drew a long breath, and said, ‘It is my duty, witness, to tell you that you are not obliged to criminate yourself.’

‘Oh yes, I am,’ she replied, as quietly as though he had said, ‘You are not obliged to sing a song.’ ‘You do not know. *I must* tell the truth. I cannot help it. It was I who poisoned Uncle Tanner.’

Here the pent-up excitement burst all bounds. It began with a gasp, and widened into a rush of feet and a roar of tongues. The court—like most of our courts of justice—was so constituted that about one-fifth of those assembled in it could hear what went on. Those who could not hear, rushed forward to learn what had happened. Those who had heard, rushed back to tell. In vain did the criers call ‘Silence!’ and the Javelin-men thump the floor with the butts of their ungainly weapons. It was not until the order to clear the court had been executed by the police with main force, that comparative order was restored.

All this time Ocna stood in the witness-box, unnerved.

‘I must admit,’ the judge began, ‘I have been unable to take a note of the last answer given by this witness.’

‘I have, my Lord,’ replied the counsel for the prisoner. ‘After your Lordship had mercifully recommended the witness not to convict herself, she said, ‘*I must* tell the truth. I cannot help it. It was I who poisoned Uncle Tanner.’

‘Is that correct, Mr. Durham?’ from the Bench.

‘It is, my Lord. I fear the witness has been tampered with.’

‘Tampered with!’ repeated his Lordship. ‘If she had modified her first statement so as to screen the prisoner, I might have thought so; but she accuses herself. It appears to me that the questions you have to consider now are simply these—first, is she in her right senses? and then, if she be not—can you go on with the case?’

‘I will ask your Lordship for an adjournment, in order that I may consult with my learned friend and the gentleman who instructs us,’ said Durham.

‘Have you any objection, brother Raikes?’

‘None, my Lord, provided that the witness be not allowed to leave,’ said the Serjeant.

‘The witness must certainly be detained in custody,’ said the judge. ‘Gentlemen of the Jury, I am sorry to put you to in-

convenience, but you must see the propriety of the course suggested. The case is adjourned till to-morrow at nine o'clock. In the mean time, I would suggest that the witness be examined by some competent medical men.'

'Frank,' said my father, gravely, as we walked to the hotel, 'you are keeping something back from me. Why did you take a prejudice against that woman when I read you her deposition? and why did she tell those awful lies, looking at you as if *you* were examining her?'

'Did she?' I replied, more to gain time than for anything else, as I knew she had never taken her eyes off mine.

'Yes, she did.'

'Remember that I was sitting right under Finch.'

'True, but the level of her look was about his knee. What does it mean?'

'Don't ask me now,' I pleaded. 'I don't know myself. I have kept a lot away from you because I thought you'd laugh at me. God only knows *what* it means. The only thing that I am sure of is that she has spoken the truth to-day.'

'You must come with me to Durham's lodgings,' my father said with decision, 'and tell all you know. There must be no concealment or nonsense in a case like this. Unless we can show that she is stark staring mad, we may just as well give up the prosecution at once, and go home.'

'If it be madness to have no moral consciousness of wrong, she is mad,' I replied.

I attended the consultation, and made a clean breast of it: told them of her extraordinary submission to me, and of the mistake I had made in attributing it to affection, of my conversation with her during which she said she was not good—would steal but for fear of punishment, and did not consider the killing of troublesome old persons to be murder; told them of my dream, of her request not to see me until after her marriage, of her pretended visit to Devonshire; told them all, but made no attempt to explain anything. I left these hard-headed lawyers in the dark, but I had caught a glimpse of light. There is nothing like going over a thing out loud before third persons, to make it clear in your own mind. Thinking to yourself is like looking through a culender. You see the object bit by bit, but its general effect is not presented.

At the hotel I found a message from the High Sheriff, requesting me to come to the gaol at once. I hurried back to Mr. Durham's lodgings, and was told that he had received a like summons,

and had started. In the matron's room I found assembled the Sheriff, Durham, and my father, Serjeant Raikes, the doctor, and another medico who had come to investigate Ocna's state of mind, the matron, and Ocna herself, who came forward with a smile, and held out her hand as though nothing remarkable had happened since last we met.

'Now,' she said, turning toward the doctors, 'you can ask me anything you like, and I will tell the truth.'

'For some reasons of her own,' remarked the gaol doctor, 'which she will not disclose, Miss Berry declines to say anything except in your presence. That is why we have sent for you.'

I bowed, and took a seat.

'Now, Miss Berry,' said the doctor, 'how long ago is it since you began to think that you poisoned old Mr. Tanner?'

'*Think* I poisoned him!' she replied; 'I *did* poison him.'

'Yes, but is it not a fact that you have heard voices saying things to you? Did the voices ever say that you had poisoned him?—now, think.'

She laughed. 'Oh, I have read all about that. Voices? nonsense! Mad people hear voices. I'm not mad. You are wasting time with your foolish questions. I want to tell the whole truth. Listen, for I am tired. When I was in India, I knew a girl who was like me—under an influence. The man, like him' (pointing to me) 'could make her do anything he pleased. She could not tell him a falsehood. We used to make play of it. One night, at a party given by the general, we agreed before she came that he was to will her to turn a certain picture round with its face to the wall—and she did so in the middle of a dance, when she thought no one was looking. When she married, the influence passed away. Perhaps it might have been the same with me. Poor Mark! I wish I had married him at once, as he wanted. From the first moment I saw you'—she continued, addressing me—'I knew that you could make me do what you pleased. When I came into court to-day, you willed that I should tell the truth—you know you did. If you had not been there, I should have told my old story.'

'And sent an innocent woman to the gallows!' I interrupted with a shudder.

'She is a horrid creature. It would not have mattered much. Perhaps her lawyers would have got her off. I had to protect myself—*then*. Well, I got that poison, as I have told you, and I was returning to my bed, when Elizabeth Tanner came in with a candle in her hand. She was walking in her sleep. I had left the doors of the cupboard open, and her shawl caught in the bolt;

she tore it free, and passed on round the room, and out again. How she frightened me! Now let me think what next: Oh! the poisoning. We were dreadfully hard pressed for money, and papa thought that perhaps Uncle Tanner would lend us some if I asked him, for my mother's sake, as he had been fond of her. By this time the idea of killing him had quite gone out of my head, for I had no chance to do so—don't you see? So we went to Swansea, and I walked alone to his house. When I got there, I was afraid to go in because of Elizabeth. I knew she hated me, and would interfere if she could. As I waited, thinking what to do—if I should send for him to come to me, or what—she went out. "Now," thought I, "the coast is clear," and I walked in. I found Uncle Tanner in the kitchen, smoking a long clay pipe, and drinking beer out of a pewter pot. At first he was only sulky: but when I told him what I wanted, he became furious; cursed my father and my mother and myself—oh, so dreadfully! I never heard such language. When I answered him, he made a blow at me with a great stick he had; and if I had not started back, he might have dashed my brains out. He raged and foamed like a maniac. He swore that none of us should have a shilling of his money; that it was an insult and an outrage for a man who had treated him as my father had done, to ask a favour of him; that he would send for a lawyer and make his will, giving everything he had to Elizabeth; and then he fell to abusing and cursing her for leaving him alone. It was then that the idea of killing him came back to my mind. I had the poison with me; I always carried it about with me, because, moving from place to place as we did, there was nowhere to hide it safely. I turned my back as if to go, shook out a little into my hand, and, watching my opportunity as he raged up and down the room, tossed it into the beer-pot.

'On my way back, I emptied the rest of the stuff out on the road, and I threw away the bottle into a ditch. We left by the steamer at night. That is all, I think. Stay; I want you to understand that papa knew nothing of this—absolutely nothing.'

'You have not told us what prompted you to come forward as a witness?' asked the doctor.

'Oh yes, I forgot. It was at Bristol, I think, that we read about Uncle Tanner in the newspapers, and heard that Elizabeth was accused of his murder. Papa gave a start, and said, 'Why, good heavens, Ocna! if this woman be hanged, we shall come in for all his property. That was why I wrote and said I knew where she got the poison; but papa had nothing to do with it.'

‘One murder was not enough for you, then?’ asked Serjeant Raikes with his bitter sneer.

‘It is absurd to talk of *murder*,’ she replied haughtily. ‘Is it murder to kill a mad dog? Uncle Tanner was no use to himself or any one. He would have drunk himself to death in a month or two. He was more than half crazy, as it was. I considered him rather as a sort of mischievous wild beast than a man; but he intended to do, and no doubt would have done, us a great wrong, as a man, if he had lived. He would have given all his money away from us to that creature. Oh! I know all about her. She ran away with a circus rider. She was as common and as vile as she could be at Leamington. Any one who knew her there will tell you that. Was such a creature to stand in my way, and go about rich and shameless, taking husbands from their wives and lovers from their sweethearts, as all such wretches do? Who knows but that she would have killed the old man herself, if she had a chance! Depend upon it, such a creature as she is did not shut herself up with him in that dull place for nothing.’

‘You have told us,’ said the doctor, after a long pause, ‘that you feel bound to tell the truth now because of some special influence which you suppose this gentleman’ (indicating me) ‘to possess over you; do you not feel yourself influenced by God’s commandment, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”?’

‘Your neighbour,’ she retorted, ‘is some one who is good to you, like the Samaritan; not a vixenish wanton like Elizabeth Tanner, who tries to supplant you and do you all the harm she can.’

‘May we take it, then, as your opinion, that an act which would be wicked if done to a good person is excusable when done to one who is not good?’

‘You may. It is common sense. What is the use of being good, and giving up all sorts of pleasant things, if you are to have no advantage over people like Robert Tanner, for example? I am very tired, sir. I have told you all I have to say. You must excuse my declining to answer any more of these foolish questions.’

The next day the chaplain saw her alone, and made no more out of her than the doctors had done. ‘She has the most extraordinary talent of perversion,’ he reported. ‘There is not one principle of ethics that she does not turn upside down and inside out, to her own perfect satisfaction. And it is all spontaneous, for she has read nothing that could prompt her to such convictions.’ This was not strictly correct, as she had horrified the worthy clergyman with anthropomorphic readings of certain events recorded in the Old Testament.

The trial of Elizabeth Tanner resulted in her acquittal. At the next assizes Ocna Berry took her place in the dock. Poor Mark, who stood loyally by her to the last, though convinced that she was temporarily insane, wished to retain counsel for her; but she insisted upon defending herself. She did so with such success—insisted upon her sanity in such a way—that the jury found her Not Guilty, on the ground of insanity, without leaving the box. The usual sentence—to be detained during Her Majesty's pleasure—was passed, and she was removed to the County Lunatic Asylum, where she died, a raving maniac, before a year had passed.

### MY WHOLE.

Now, the enigma presented is—was she insane, all the time? Was her idea, that I exercised an influence over her, the delusion of a failing mind? Or, being sane, was her sad end brought about by the horror of her position, and a newly awakened feeling of remorse? I have answered it *Yes*, and I have been certain that *No* should be the reply, according as I admitted or rejected certain propositions which caused serious people at that time to scoff. When I ask myself how I came to dream that dream, and how she came to know, when about to give her evidence, that I willed her to tell the truth, I cannot but conclude that there is something supernatural in it. When I reflect that I never had the slightest wish to control her, did absolutely nothing to subject her to my will, and never before or since exercised such power over any one—I am inclined to admit that natural forces were at work in her poor brain. But then, the dream! There is nothing the matter with *me*. I am a prosaic, plodding old attorney-at-law, with a grown-up family—one whom no one, I think, will accuse of lunacy. There is a mystery about that dream which flows over the whole case, which cannot be extricated from it, and which carries me back to a vicious circle in which I go round and round, undecided.

ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE.

## The Shriek.

It was a shriek which I can never forget ; it came deadened by distance and by the obstructions through which it had to make its way to my ears, as I passed through the almost deserted street that ran by the shadowy front of the hospital. It came so wild with surprise and horror that it seemed to me different from any sound of agony or anguish that I had ever heard from living lips. I could not have conceived that a human being could have wailed so ghastly an utterance of terror and of misery ; they told me afterwards, that, as it thrilled through hall and corridor and along the long ranges of dimly-lighted beds, not a nurse, not a patient, but started and, wondering, prayed God to pity the poor wretch who uttered it. It roused the whole slumbering building, it filled every separate hearer with the dread he or she most shuddered at. One heard in it that wild cry which he himself would have uttered had he awaked to a sudden sense of the suffocation of smoke and the roar of surrounding flames cutting him off from all escape from the infernal death of fire. Another caught in it that yell which night would have heard from him had his sleeping sight started into a hideous knowledge of a murderer's knife at his throat. The most dreaded conceptions of each seemed at once to find voice in that one sound. A student swore to the group that, undressed, surrounded him, that he was sure it was from the ghost of one who had died in their lecture theatre under the torture of some hideous operation, who was revisiting the scene of the earthly torments from which he had fled to the calm refuge of death. I had rushed to the lodge when the sound first reached my ear, and, hardly waiting to give heed to the half-awake wonder of the porter, had sprung up the stone steps that led to the central hall. As I paused, bewildered, doubting which way I should turn, a policeman who had followed me, sure that such a sound must mean work for him, passed me, and a rush of half-dressed students, all questioning—none answering—came pouring down the broad staircases, eager and excited. We all listened. We thought that a second shriek each moment would follow the first, to scare the night and guide us to the utterer. So we stood with an expectant fear, but we waited in vain ; cloud after cloud drifted lightly over the bright white moon, now filling the lofty hall with ghostly shadows, now leaving it white with cold, silent light. We heard nothing

more, and, amid a confused babble of wondering exclamations, I left for home.

I awoke late next day. My rest, till I at last fell into a dead sleep, had been feverish and broken; I had dreams that it would have been a pleasure to have escaped from into such temporary lulls of half-wakefulness as I had known had not consciousness roused itself only to ring with that fearful sound. You have doubtless experienced that plague of memory which at some time or other has, I suppose, afflicted most persons; this Tennyson has alone, as far as I know, described. But it was a pleasant ghost of sound that haunted the mind of his *Miller's Daughter*.

With me, the one remembrance then and long after was that yell of despair, which alike in the quiet hush of night or the busy bustle of the day would suddenly in a moment fill me with a dread that I could not laugh or reason off, however I accused myself of folly in allowing myself to be overmastered by a fancy. I was in London in daily expectation of a summons to take my passage to Monte Video, to which place I was bound to superintend the construction of the new railway. I had made my last preparations, and, having no friends I had not bid adieu to, I had all my time on my hands. Perhaps it was this unoccupied state of my mind that left it more free to brood over the impression the event I have related had so strangely produced upon me. I loitered idly through my dressing, I sat long over my breakfast, I tried to read the *Times*, and then to interest myself in a volume of travels through that part of South America to which I was going. All would not do; whether I dressed, or ate, or read, the one recollection would recur and prevent any other subject from wholly occupying my thoughts. I threw down the book almost with a warmer exclamation than I am at all accustomed to indulge in, even when in my hottest of moods. I must get to the bottom of that night's mystery, I said to myself, if it be only to lay the phantom of terror with which it has plagued me. It was doubtless but some ordinary brutality, which the police reports daily harrow our sympathies with, that gave birth to the sound that haunts me. If I learn that it was from some wretched wife, or wife that should be, battered and kicked by her lawful or temporary owner, I should quickly lose all thought of it except as one of those occurrences that make us shudder to know of what strange elements our boasted civilisation is composed. As I walked towards Southwark, breasting with some difficulty the tide of black-coated life that was still pouring over London Bridge to the business of the day, I know not why the recollection of an old schoolfellow wandered into my head and would occupy my thoughts; it may be that my raid into

St. Thomas's caused me to call him to mind, for he had, I knew, come to London to walk this very hospital, and fit himself for the quiet country practice from which his father had extracted a comfortable living till his early death, and which his widowed mother hoped her son would be able to regain when his term of study was completed. Michael Felton had been the cock of our school. All whose education was entrusted to the Reverend Doctor Holmes had at once a liking for, and yet a not causeless dread of, the kind-hearted but overbearing lad whose character was made up of so puzzling a compound of conflicting qualities. Nature had doubtless made him a good-natured, impulsive boy. He had needed but such kindly training as his father's companionship might have given to his natural disposition to have strengthened by practice his impulses into ordinary habits; but how could his overworked father spare any time to his son? The day was from early till late occupied with visits to his patients. If an hour were stolen from the daily round of work it was spent in the performance of those public duties which a man of his intelligence in a country district can hardly neglect without losing self-respect. To say the truth, Dr. Felton had anything but a wish to leave to others those labours for the improvement of his neighbourhood, of the want of which his professional experience made him more fully aware than most. To such a mind as his, cultivated and in the truest sense Christian, the scenes which daily passed before his eyes were such as to make the bettering of the poor, both in body and in mind, a subject which occupied all the little leisure his large practice allowed. The brutality, the helplessness, the servility, and the selfishness of the farm-labourers of the district were, he clearly saw, but the necessary outcome of the ignorance which was held by their betters to be the birthright of the British peasant. It was to lift them out of this rural savagery that the worthy Doctor strove. Schools, libraries, and clubs were his hobbies; by means of these he sought to build up the intelligence and the independence of these modern serfs. His passion for the elevation of the many left him no time for the home training of his boy. He was thus necessarily abandoned to his mother—one of those worthy, weak, well-intentioned women whose unguarded affection works at times so much harm upon those they most idolise. Little Michael became from his boyhood upwards, even during his father's lifetime, that most-to-be-pitied of mortals, a spoilt, unchecked child. An infant in arms, he had, of course, his own way. What infant in arms has not, even from the strongest minded of mothers? As a child petticoated and pinafores he learnt to rule his mother, and she was taught to obey his noisy whims under a penalty of a very

tempest of shrieks and sobs, if she dared to thwart him; and these, with her, were to be pacified with any concession. The boy grew in self-will faster than he grew in height. His father saw little of him, for he saw just that little of his home that every country surgeon does, whose practice lies through a wide and thinly-populated district. The boy had quickness enough generally to curb his imperativeness in his father's presence. Experience taught him that the parent he saw so little of was of sterner stuff than the loving and softer mother he was fond of and defied. At times his temper, unaccustomed to control, had exhibited itself even in the fatherly presence, sometimes to meet with a needed check that restored it forthwith to the curb, more frequently to be more gently chidden; for how could he whose kindness to his one child so seldom had the opportunity of showing itself, find heart enough to fill the rare minutes that he spent with his son in harshness and reproof? Death came early to the busy Doctor. A hot summer had filled the hovels of the district with the customary typhus fever, bred of the filth which appeared at their very doorways. That which cleanliness and drainage should have prevented he had to cure. But this time disease acted upon his overworked and weakened system. From the death-beds of patients he staggered to his own. A few days of suffering while reason remained, of wild raving when it had departed, and the widow and orphan looked their last upon their dead, and knew they had to live in an altered world for the future. Yet their new life was not so desolate as that of many whom professional men so often bequeath to the charity of friends. Mrs. Felton found herself, when her late husband's affairs were wound up, in possession of enough to place her above actual want, though not of sufficient to enable her easily to fulfil his and her own dearest wish, that their son should grow up to fill the position which his father had occupied in his native place. Yet whatever privation she herself might have to endure to give her son the necessary training for his profession, that his mother made up her mind he should have. To our Reverend Doctor's he was sent for that last year's finish which would give him that knowledge of the dead languages needed to enable him to cure living sufferers. He and I had been friends through our school days—though why it would be difficult to say. Our dispositions were as different as they well could be. Affectionate, impulsive, passionate, and overbearing, he in other cases made friends but to throw them off again before long. Those whom his good-nature attracted were soon repelled by his intolerance of all opposition or of all claim to independence of action, or even to any assertion to a right to a will dif-

fering from his own. Perhaps I was indifferent to his having his own way in trifles—satisfied with self-assertion on more important matters; and this may have made me a satisfactory companion to him until prolonged knowledge of each other's good points and the habit of mutual confidence strengthened our liking into a stronger feeling, which made him curb his self-willedness in my case. Perhaps the coolness and strength of character for which I was the more distinguished than himself gave to me a certain power over him which held his selfishness in check. Certainly it was not on many occasions that I was called on to feel any necessity for self-assertion. Perhaps the rareness of these defensive displays on my part rendered them the more effective. They never failed to effect their purpose. They hardly on any occasion produced even a temporary coolness between us, and it was with no small regret we parted company when we left school and took our several ways through the separate paths in life marked out for us. He, of course, came to London to walk the hospitals. He had told me what his mother's income was, and I knew that with the hardest economy on his part she would have to pinch herself sadly to find enough to spare to him for his support during the years that must pass before he would be able to start on his proposed career. It was some time before I heard of him. I, too, had left home to fit myself for my own profession at a leading engineer's in Glasgow. It was about a year from our parting before I spent my annual holiday at E——. What I then heard of Michael Felton surprised me perhaps more than it ought to have done, and made me anxious for his future, in which, for old friendship's sake, I felt no little interest. He had started well. For the first few months he had earned the blessing of his mother by the apparent steadiness of his conduct and the evident carefulness of his expenditure. Of his progress in study she spoke with pride. But before long all changed, and the poor solitary woman grew wont to shun the very mention of her son, so lately the one subject that she delighted to dwell upon. At first friends and neighbours did not understand this. They could only see that those who did not wish to pain her must avoid any question respecting him. Too soon it became common talk why this was. All who knew her learned to pity poor Mrs. Felton; to pity because she had the son whom she had looked to be the consolation, the comfort, and the support of the widowed years she had yet to live. That self-will and want of all self-restraint which had made the boy a trouble and a care, now made the grown man first an anxiety and at last a terror to her. He lost all care for her counsel and pity for her entreaties. He met her affection with ingratitude, doubt, and reproach. One by one he rapidly descended the circles

of London fast life, and as he lost character and self-respect, so his thought for her in money matters lessened till it was altogether lost. In the fierce need of his entanglements, he grew reckless of whether he left to her enough to keep up the decent respectability which she had been always accustomed to maintain. He drained her soon in a way to show that he had no care as to whether she had even the barest necessities. She had ever shunned debt. She made a first stand against his demands when that was required which, if she gave it, would compel her to descend to the novelty of taking credit. It was then that her neighbours learnt how debased he had become. The little she clung to with which to pay her small, diminished expenditure, that little the old servant heard first begged, then demanded, at last, with rage and oaths. This was not the last of such scenes. Between them came repentance and remorse, showing the old love still lived, but then followed some fresh outburst even more violent than had yet occurred. Medical students who do give themselves to dissipation soon gather round them those who, more debased than themselves, glory to laugh down their scruples and hurry them from bad to worse. Michael Felton was soon held as one altogether lost. His visits to his mother were now unfrequent. He only came when he thought he could extract something to extricate him from some fresh liability that was plaguing him. The last time he came to her he had been so violent that she had to expose her misery by calling in friends to protect her from his abuse, and to see him dash from her, mad with rage, swearing with curses, to which those who heard him shuddered to listen, that never more would he feel towards her as a son, or see her in life. She never recovered that. It did not at once kill her. She slowly grieved to death, with no word of reproach towards the son who was her murderer, and whom she still supplied with an allowance which should have given to her those strengthening comforts she now so much needed. He had kept his word. Since he left with that accursed oath, he had never seen her. Does he know, I thought, that she is dead? Had he been left ignorant of the stabs his curse inflicted on her very life? I had seen in the *Times*, only two days since, that the end had come. She was where all eyes are dried, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. If the end had come and he had not known it, or had hardened his heart against relenting before she died, and giving to her dying lips at the last the innocent boy's kiss of his childhood, I knew, now she was gone, how much he would be prostrated with agony and remorse, and how the grief of such a loss would again strike the rock of his nature, and the old forgotten water would gush

forth. Too late! too late! saddest words that human lips have ever uttered; these words, with him, would be as bitter as they had ever been to man; and, as I went walking on, I pitied my old school friend with a pity that would have been painful had not that other recollection that so haunted me intruded itself so as to prevent my mind so completely forgetting it as to give itself fully up to indulgence in any feeling. As I turned once more through the gateway of the hospital, I know not why, I felt an inexplicable depression for which I had no cause, and yet which I nevertheless felt oppress me. I tried to mock myself as my thoughts suggested that 'Coming events cast their shadows before.' I had no anxieties of my own just then to threaten me. I knew of nothing that I could have to dread. Yet the feeling was strong upon me. I crossed the paved courtyard and, mounting the steps, I reached the central hall, now bright with the morning sun—how different from the night before! Just as I went to the beadle's box to set at rest my curiosity respecting the occurrence which had so impressed me, that same awful shriek thrilled through the building, though now it came from above me, from some woful ward where the sufferer was. My question was answered quickly. A student named Michael Felton had, it seemed, bargained with two resurrectionists—for these were the days when such things were—to provide him with a female and a male subject. As such transactions were legally punishable, though winked at by the professors, he had received his purchases alone, in the unlighted dissecting room, late in the last night. The money was paid for them, and the reckless buyer had, it appeared, hauled the heavy clayey sacks on to one of the tables to ascertain the state of the corpses, now his property, and their fitness for his purpose. The one, a man's, was inspected and held undeniably useful. The other was an aged woman's. By the fitful light of the moon he cut the cord and threw back the sack from the grey-haired head. Then it was that that shriek, which had so startled me, shrilled through the night. When they found him he was sitting by the dead, muttering 'Mother!' a hopeless lunatic. Only, at long intervals, he uttered that terrible cry which I now fled from as if it had been death.

W. C. BENNETT.

## Woodhouselee.

WOODHOUSELEE was a cheery place  
 When Bothwellhaugh brought home his bride ;  
 The folk blessed either comely face,  
 As he and she rode side by side :  
 They welcomed both with song and shout,  
 As Roslin bells rang gaily out ;  
 Was never thought of dread or doubt  
 At merry Woodhouselee.

Woodhouselee was a dreary place  
 When traitor Murray's minion came ;  
 No thought of pity nor of grace,  
 But all the house was one light flame ;  
 They drove her forth, and bade her go  
 Barefooted through the blinding snow,  
 With babe at breast, they mocked her woe  
 In cruel Woodhouselee.

Woodhouselee is an eerie place  
 When night upon the woodland falls,  
 For then a form is seen to pace  
 Beside the mere beneath the walls :  
 A dame in white, who weeps and wrings,  
 And now she shrieks and now she sings,  
 Until a ghostly shot there rings  
 Round haunted Woodhouselee.

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING.



*'And now she shrieks and now she sings.'*

## Professor Petrus.

AMBER PASHA had come to London on one of his brief visits. They were always at long intervals; they were always uncertain; they always gave pleasure to every one who knew him, and indeed to every one in London who had ever heard of him. The Pasha's strange career, his eccentric life, his long residence in the East, and the fabulous stories that were told of his wealth and accomplishments, made him an object of intense curiosity to the capital, and to the Society Journals. The newspaper which was able to be the first to chronicle the fact that Amber Pasha had made a momentary appearance at his house in Park Lane was very proud of its good fortune, and generally followed it up with a variety of ingenious and inaccurate paragraphs about Amber Pasha's actions, and with endless variations on the most marvellous versions of his history.

It was a pleasant morning in early summer. Amber Pasha had a friend to breakfast, a solitary friend, Harry Jermyn, member of Parliament, philosophical radical, and rising lawyer. Breakfast was over, and they had come out of the Roman-like room whose frescoed walls would have pleased the taste of Petronius without offending the gravity of Seneca, and were sitting lazily on pleasant long chairs in the wide balcony where the great *rosso antico* Caryatides eternally lifted their rounded arms to heaven. For a time the two friends sat silently, looking down lazily through the blue clouds of cigarette smoke at the endless pageant of London life rolling by, and enjoying the tranquil beauty of a June midday. The two men whom chance had brought together on that balcony overlooking Park Lane were of curiously different types. Amber Pasha was, in the completest sense, a citizen of the world. Before he had settled in the East and devoted himself to the service of the Sultan, he had passed an adventurous youth. He seemed to have been everywhere and seen everything, to be as much at home in an Akkhal Tekke *aoul* as in the gardens of Buen Retiro at Madrid, or at Therapia upon the Bosphorus. Amber Pasha was an attractive character to all the world, but perhaps to no one was he more intensely attractive than to Harry Jermyn. Jermyn was making his way steadily, and looked forward to a seat on the ministerial benches, should his party come into power at the next general election. He was always going to go in for a great travel, one of these days, but in the meantime there were so many blue-books

to read, and there were the speeches to be made to his constituents, and there was his steadily increasing practice at the bar, and his determination to make a fortune. In long vacation and when the House was happily up, he generally went for a long tramp in the Swiss Alps, and sometimes even pushed into Italy, a solitary, nineteenth-century Hannibal. He always walked as much as he could, first because he knew it was the best thing to keep him in form for the year's work, and next because it was the cheapest mode of travel he knew of, and cheapness was an object with a man meaning to make his fortune as soon as he could. So in that knowledge of the world which A'Kempis would condemn, and which consists in seeing a great many places, Jermyn was considerably behind the average Cook's tourist.

The two oddly chosen companions had sat silent for some little while. Amber Pasha had all the true Oriental capacity for that rarest and most precious of social gifts, a companionable silence. You might sit with him for hours if you liked without exchanging half a dozen sentences, and yet without ever feeling that you were wasting your time, or that such grave sweet silence could possibly be dull. Amber Pasha used always to say that he was chiefly attracted to Oriental life by its capacity for keeping quiet in a too noisy world. The still serenity of a people who could sit quietly for hours and find a patient delight in interminable romance had won him at an age when life's fever was burning its highest. He used himself to say that one of the things which first lured him to an Oriental existence was an incident he witnessed during his earliest visit to Cairo. He was riding out to the Pyramids one morning. At the corner of a street some elderly Arabs were seated, gravely, silently smoking. A donkey laden with sand was trotting by, when it suddenly slipped and spilt its burden in great yellow heaps over and about the feet of the seated Arabs. They said nothing, did nothing, did not even remove the amber mouthpieces from their lips, and the Englishman rode on. He came back in the evening, and at the same spot the same Arabs still sat and smoked, and the yellow sand was still heaped about their feet. They had never moved through all those hours, had never taken the trouble to rise and shake the sand away. 'There,' said Amber Pasha—he was not a Pasha then, however—'there are true philosophers.'

Suddenly Jermyn drew his cigarette from his lips, sent a couple of grey clouds into the air, allowed a sigh to escape after them, and said, 'I often wish that I had your life, Pasha. The only romance left to us of to-day is the romance of travel, and though you wouldn't think it, now, I am rather of a romantic mind.'

Amber Pasha smiled, for he knew of Jermyn's passion for Violet Hampden.

'There isn't much that's romantic in an ordinary London life,' added Jermyn with another sigh, which he promptly silenced by resuming his cigarette. The Pasha smoked on for a few minutes before he answered.

'You're wrong, Harry, quite wrong. You say I've been everywhere and done everything. Well, what would you say if I were to tell you that the most romantic, the oddest, the strangest thing that ever happened to me in my life, happened to me here in this very London you despise so much?'

Jermyn looked up at him. 'How was that?' he said.

'It's a long story,' said the Pasha; 'some other time I'll tell you all about it.'

'No, no; let me have it now,' urged Jermyn, looking at his friend in eager surprise. 'You may be off to Mecca or Lord knows where to-morrow, and who can say when we shall meet again?'

Amber Pasha was silent for a few minutes. 'I have never told it to any one,' he said, 'but with you it's different. Yet it is a painful memory.'

He was silent again, and stared out into the street with a melancholy wistful look on his face, unlike its wonted sweet gravity. Jermyn said nothing, but smoked and looked at him.

'It was years ago,' Amber Pasha suddenly began again, 'many years ago. I had just come back from my first visit to the East, when I was little more than a boy.'

Jermyn nodded. 'Go on,' he said.

'I had not been many days in town, I had been away for a long time, and was glad to be back again. I had been ill abroad just before I came home, and was still a weakly convalescent; so I used to take a keen pleasure in simply walking about the streets and congratulating myself on being able to do so and to enjoy everything I saw; I rather steered clear of engagements for a bit, and people weren't very much in town, so I enjoyed myself in quite a primitive and pastoral fashion, lounging about all day, dining modestly at the club, and going to bed early; it was really very pleasant. Do you know, Harry, there are few pleasanter things than to be alone for a while in a place like London, and have nothing to do but lounge about and see what happens; at least I thought so then.' He paused for a few seconds, and began again, in a somewhat disconnected manner.

'The first time I ever met Professor Petrus was one day when I was going into the British Museum. He was coming out as

I was entering, and he held back the swinging glass door for me to pass through. I bowed my thanks for his courtesy, and as I did so I was struck with his strange face. He was not an old man, perhaps fifty, but he was curiously bent, almost to deformity, and the head which was thrust forward from between his shoulders was one of the strangest that it has ever been my fortune to look upon. Grey-black hair formed itself in short curls all over his head, and a dark beard and moustache covered the lower part of his face. There was something in his eyes that strangely fascinated me in the brief glance I had at them. They seemed to fix you through and through with their gaze, and then dropped as if they had done with you, and knew all about you, and need be troubled with you no more. Such a flashing glance he gave me, and then turned, and the door swung behind him, and we parted. But the memory of his face haunted me for some time after with a curious sense of interest. I was very glad, therefore, when it gazed upon me again one evening coming through the open doorway of the drawing-room of a friend at an evening party. The keen, sharp, deeply lined face turned on me for a moment as he stood in the doorway, before making his way to his hostess, and I felt sure that he recognised me again, though he made no sign, and in another moment he had passed me and had disappeared in the crowd. I am quick to notice peculiarities, and I observed that his evening dress was much more careful than his morning habit had been on the day I met him. I noticed also that in his shirt front three Egyptian scarabs served him for studs. The person, whoever it was, with whom I had been talking, left me, and I immediately turned to my hostess. "Can you tell me," I said, "who that strange man is who spoke to you a few minutes ago, a dark man?"

"My hostess smiled and said, "There are a good many strange people here to-night. You know I like strange people."

"To be more particular, the man I mean," I said, "is short and much stooped. He has a keen worn face, and if you want any more evidence, he wears Egyptian scarabs in his shirt front."

"Oh, you mean Professor Petrus," my hostess answered.

"Who is Professor Petrus?" I inquired.

"Professor Petrus," she replied, "is the greatest Egyptologist living. I believe he knows more about the Pharaohs than any other person in the world, which I suppose is a thing to be very proud of; but he is a curious man, and a very interesting man."

"I should like to know him very much," I interposed.

"You shall, certainly," said my hostess; "see; there he is. He is talking just now to a young lady. You must not disturb him."

Professor Petrus was indeed talking in a very animated manner

to a young girl who was sitting in a corner of the room near the window. There were flowers behind them, and the group was certainly strange. The girl was very lovely and very young.

‘I dare say you will know her name. She was an elder sister of that pretty Miss Van Duyten, the American beauty, who disturbed London society so much some three years ago. She seemed to be listening with an air of half-dislike to what he was saying; he was speaking very rapidly, bending over her with his face quite close to hers, his whole manner informed by an almost grotesque eagerness. As my hostess spoke, some young man or other, who had met the American girl before, came out of the crowd and advanced to speak to her. She turned to him with a look of unmistakable pleasure, not indeed, as I read it, at the arrival of that particular young man, but of anybody to take her away from the observations of Professor Petrus, who himself drew back with an air of annoyance on his dark odd face.

“‘You see,” I said, “the American girl does not mind interruption, you might introduce me now.”

‘My hostess took me across to where Professor Petrus was standing. He was apparently lost in reflections, for he did not seem to notice our approach, until my hostess touched him on the shoulder with her fan.

“‘Professor, may I introduce to you my friend, Mr. Amber?”

‘Professor Petrus turned round sharply, and bowed, without, however, holding out his hand. His eyes flashed through me as before. Straight bright eyes they were, and no look of recognition came into them.

‘I muttered a few words about “pleasure at the honour,” and “anxiety to meet so distinguished a scholar;” to which the Professor listened with an unmoved countenance.

“‘Do you know anything about Egyptian studies?” he asked sharply, when my hostess had moved away.

‘I said I was sorry to say I knew very little about them.

“‘Then why are you pleased to see me? That is my topic. I am an Egyptologist. I am nothing else. Those who speak to me do so because they wish to learn something from me which they can learn from no one else.”

‘This was rather an annoying reception, and yet I felt almost inclined to laugh. There was something odd in the man’s manner. I answered quietly that though I was not versed in Egyptology, I was interested in it, as in most things, and felt interested in a man whose fame for such knowledge was so great. “Besides,” I added, “few men really are so engrossed in any one topic that they may not find some themes in common with others of their kind.”

‘Professor Petrus answered, “You are young ; I am old. You have your life before you ; mine lies behind me. You have health and strength ; I”—he made a curious shrugging motion of his arms and hands—“I am what you see me.”

‘I hastened to observe that a man of Professor Petrus’s age need hardly speak of his life as lying behind him ; but he shook his head in a deprecatory manner as if my remarks only annoyed him ; so I ventured to suggest that as I had just been in Egypt, I was naturally drawn to any one who knew much about the country.

‘“You have been in Egypt ?” said Professor Petrus. “It is a wonderful country.”

‘I assented.

‘“We don’t understand it, perhaps,” he said, “yet, but we can try to, and with patience we may come to a fuller understanding of the great races to whom we owe so much.”

‘Our talk here fell upon Egypt. He asked me many questions, as I had been there some months later than he. We found we knew one or two persons in common, and as he talked very brilliantly, and I can say that I listened with almost equal brilliancy, our conversation was singularly attractive, at least to me, and I was sorry when a fresh introduction put an end to it.

‘You know that I have a peculiar method of enjoying myself in cities that are new or strange to me, and at this time London was new and strange to me ; for I had been away from it for some years, and London always seems fresh to the returned traveller. In such case I love wandering by myself through the streets. Not indeed hurrying as chance directs me, for I am fond of following some one of the passers-by—the first person I happen to come across, it matters not whom, a working-man perhaps, or even a pretty woman—just to see where my brief connection with some portion of their lives may lead me ; and very often it has led me into things of interest enough, but never to such strange circumstances as this trick of mine brought about one night shortly after the evening I have been speaking to you of. It was a fine evening of middle spring when the struggling sunlight tried to cheat the world into a belief that the air was warm, and when the lengthening evenings gave promise of the return of that golden age which always comes with the summer. I had nothing to do. I had been busy all day, and I strolled out after dinner and let chance take me where it would. I followed my usual plan of letting some unknown individual guide me my course, with but little result at first, for the first man I chanced to follow soon called a cab and was whirled away from me, and another speedily reached his dwelling and passed in, and a third walked too slowly, and I

soon passed him and forgot him. At last I saw a working-man ahead of me with a basket of tools upon his shoulder, and I chose him to be for the moment my unconscious guide in my saunter. The evening was darkening down; lamps were being lit; the streets were dim and crowded, and I had to keep my attention carefully fixed on my self-chosen herald if I did not mean to miss him. It is almost comic the way in which the lives of others may influence without thought or intention on their part. That worthy British workman, tramping home to his late tea, never saw me, never heard of me, has not the faintest idea that he was ever an object of curiosity to any one, or that he was the cause, perhaps the ordained cause, of terrible events in the lives of three human beings with whom he had nothing whatever in common, and who, but for him——Kismet, I suppose.

‘He led me into a curious part of the town, into the region of streets at the other side of Oxford Street. His destination would seem to have been somewhere in the Portland Road direction, but I never knew for certain where he was going, for as I was pursuing his steps across a way where two streets met a figure came across him from a by-street who turned my attention very speedily from my working-man.

‘The figure that shot past me, and of whom I got a glimpse for a moment in the light of a lamp, was certainly that of Professor Petrus. I felt some desire to renew our talk of a few evenings before; so letting my working-man go where he would, I turned to my right and followed the quickly walking Professor. I had not gone many steps before my intention to stop and speak with him suddenly altered. I could not help thinking it vaguely curious that he should be wandering about in this odd part of London; though why I should have thought it curious I scarcely knew, and I felt somehow impelled by an unreasonable desire to find out where he was going to, and to know something more about the mysterious Professor than any one else apparently knew. You will say, perhaps, that my curiosity was scarcely commendable, and I admit it only too willingly; but I was younger then, and thought of adventure in everything when I thought at all, and I did not reflect upon the unworthiness of seeking out any mystery in a man’s life which he desired to keep to himself. I wish I had. I crossed the street and followed at a distance the bowed form which was making its way so rapidly along the busy pavement. The neighbourhood was poor, there were a great many small shops which appeared to be doing a good deal of business—it was a Saturday night—and there were stalls and wheelbarrows in the roadway lit by flaring oil lamps. People were buying and selling,

bargaining and shouting; all was noise and confusion and to a stranger bewilderment. A Cairo bazaar, when a party of wealthy Franks make their appearance in its ways, could not be louder or more bustling. But Professor Petrus threaded his way through the throng with an ease and rapidity which I envied and found it hard to imitate. He glided along so quickly and so dexterously that no one seemed to notice his odd, misshapen presence. He suddenly passed out of the clamour and glare and stir into a quieter and darker street, turned sharply down another, then down a third, I still following. A third turning took him from my sight for a moment. When I got to the corner the Professor had disappeared. The turning led into a dingy crescent, composed of houses of humble appearance, girdling a space of faded grass and dismal trees. As I stood there the door of one of the dwellings at the end closed with a loud noise. For some minutes I stood wondering what I should do next, wondering too what Professor Petrus was doing there, and thinking a little that it was no business of mine to know. Then I walked quietly towards the house whose door I had heard shut. It was near one of the few lamp-posts which faintly lit the dreary place, and I could see it sufficiently distinctly, as I see it now in my memory though I have not been near the place for some years, and hope earnestly never to be near it again. It was a commonplace house in a commonplace crescent of houses. There was nothing whatever remarkable or curious in any way about it, so I decided to myself, except perhaps the fact that no gleam of light shone from any of its windows upon the street beneath, though in all the other houses faint chinks of light showed through curtains and shutters, and from garret windows, to tell the world outside that human beings dwelt there. There was really something depressing, almost uncanny, in the effect of this single lightless house that seemed as if it had gone to sleep, or indeed had been dead and buried in the midst of its living neighbours. It might have been a tomb, so still and quiet was it, so soundless and lightless in a place itself alive, a place so near to streets full of noise and brightness. I stared at it for some minutes, and then reflected that possibly Professor Petrus might be looking out of the window, and wondering what I was doing or waiting for. I turned and walked swiftly away. But I could not walk off the odd fancies that clung to me, and the curious desire I felt to know something more about Professor Petrus and his business in the gloomy silent house. There was, of course, no strong reason why Professor Petrus should not live in this crescent if he felt inclined to do so; yet it seemed a strange place for him, a scholar, and, if report told

truly, a rich man, to choose for a habitation, and I had a vague impression of hearing that he lived somewhere else. Altogether the thing had something mysterious about it which set my fancy going, and made me eager to know more of the matter. That evening a friend of mine had a reception, and I felt sure that I should meet there somebody to tell me something about Professor Petrus.

‘It was still early, only a little past nine. I drove home, dressed, and got to the party. Among the guests I found my hostess of the preceding week—my introducer to the Professor, who was now occupying all my thoughts. I made for her, and began a casual conversation, which I determined should lead up to the Professor, when she anticipated my intention by suddenly inquiring, “How did you like Professor Petrus?” Somewhat surprised at a question which jumped so closely with my own thoughts, I replied that he interested me greatly, which indeed was true, if a somewhat vapid way of putting the truth. She told me much about him. He was a great scholar and unwearying student, whose word was law on the peculiar branch of knowledge he had taken for himself; he lived the lonely life of a hardworking man; he was occasionally, though not often, to be met at certain houses, and he sometimes made his appearance at the dinner-table of Lord Lancelot, who liked to gather people of name about him, and who found a great attraction in the bitter sayings and strange cynical ideas of Professor Petrus. I asked her casually where Professor Petrus lived, as I should like to call upon him; and she told me that he lodged in Great Russell Street, just opposite the British Museum.

‘I was right then. He did not live in the mysterious crescent to which I had tracked him on the preceding night, and yet he certainly was not paying a visit, for there had been no knock at the door or I should have heard it. He had passed in silently and surely, as men pass into dwellings which they have a right to enter.

‘The next day found me outside the mysterious dwelling. It looked still more mysterious by day than it had seemed at night, for I saw now the explanation of its absence of light on the preceding evening. Every window in the house was close-shuttered, from the windows below the area to the garrets, around which some sparrows were circulating in evident consciousness of undisturbed capacity for nest-building. It was a dingy, dirty house enough, only conspicuous in any way from the rest of its neighbours by being perhaps a shade more dusty and more dingy than they were. The paint peeled from its doors in ragged uneven patches. The railings were broken and rusty. The bell-pull hung torn and

soundless from its socket. The knocker had apparently been wrenched away long ago. The house was evidently old Georgian; over the straggling ragged steps that led to the doorway an arch of iron ended in an empty square that had once supported a lamp, and below it stuck out the metal extinguishers into whose flower-like mouths the linkmen of the last century were wont to thrust their torches. It may have been a bright and splendid building enough in the days when George III. was king. Fair ladies and stately gentlemen might have waited for their chairs in the crescent, and the courtly clink of swords been heard in its hallway. I thought to myself that the ghosts of eighteenth-century exquisites and wits and beauties must surely haunt that deserted shuttered dwelling, and make ghostly mirth in the abandoned rooms. But were the rooms abandoned? After all I could not tell. Behind those close-lidded eyes of windows what might not be hidden? For I felt sure, with that strange certainty which sometimes comes upon us at odd moments of our lives,—I felt certain that there was something hidden, and that Professor Petrus had a secret, and that the secret was here almost within my grasp, temptingly close yet defiantly distant in this dark and seemingly desolate dwelling-place. I had no right whatever to learn this secret, no warrant to pursue it further, but without right or warrant I pursued it to the end.

‘On both the houses on each side of *the* house there were cards in the window announcing “rooms to let.” I entered the left-hand one, and asked to be shown the rooms. There were two on the third floor, both bedrooms, poor mean-looking things enough, not too clean, and assuredly not too comfortable, and the rent they asked me was certainly not extravagant. I took both the rooms, settled all questions of reference by an immediate payment of some weeks in advance, and found myself the master of apartments next door to the mystery I was seeking after. I really felt quite excited as I surveyed my new abode, and looked at the latch-key which my landlady had put into my hand in token of part-proprietorship of her house. I felt that something strange was about to happen, and with the feeling there came that strange *exalté* mood which takes possession of us at such times, and I was indifferent to everything else but to the task I had undertaken.

‘The window of my back room overlooked the garden of the house whose secret I was seeking to discover. All the gardens in the crescent were of the kind familiar in certain parts of London; long narrow strips of ground utterly abandoned in most cases to the winds and rain, or made to serve as open-air lumber rooms for the reception of rejected furniture, broken dishes, venerable meat

cans, and rubbish of all sorts. Here and there, however, some citizen, more mindful of the charms of a garden, had devoted a little time and care to the improvement of his patch of earth, and had sown grass and laid down gravel, and portioned off with tiles the arid bed of pebbly earth in which dejected flowers did their best to flourish. A few houses off I saw that some occupant of more enterprising spirit than his fellows had set up a target whose painted face seemed to stare reproachfully at its uncongenial surroundings. But I never saw any one come forth equipped with bow and arrows to test his skill in the pastime sacred to the memory of Robin Hood and Roger Ascham. Of all the deserted gardens that of the mysterious house was the most deserted. There hung over it a gloom of hopeless decay which was profoundly melancholy to contemplate. All seemed barren and desolate. The trees which existed in some of the other gardens, and which lent a graciousness to the place with the fresh greenness of their spring apparel, had no fellows in this dismal spot; only a few stray tufts of grass endeavoured to put in their testimony to the fruitfulness of mother earth.

‘I could not of course see the windows of the house that for the time occupied my attention, but I found an excuse for wandering into the garden of my lodging and surveying the building. All was as closely shut behind as before; no semblance of life was about the place; nothing to indicate that aught human lingered behind the sightless windows. The mystery was more strange than ever. What could Professor Petrus want in so desolate a dwelling? I became more determined than ever that I would pluck out the heart of the mystery which lurked behind the dead screen of the orbless dwelling. There come moments in the lives of most of us when we act upon a kind of instinct which seems as if it were apart from ourselves, and were practically disassociated from our own thoughts. While I was engaged upon this task I lay under the spell of a spirit of curiosity which in my wiser hours I should have regarded with contempt, and which even at the time I was able to look upon at moments with something like wonder. But I was possessed by an evil spirit of inquiry, and I was resolved to go on with the enterprise which was exercising over me its fatal fascination. It does seem sometimes as if our lives were planned out for us, and that it would hardly have been in our power to make them other than they were destined to be. I don’t offer this suggestion as excuse for my conduct, which I have never since forgotten to regret.

‘Though I watched the desolate garden from my back window for a whole day, no sign of life became evident in its dreary space,

whose wretched earth seemed as if it had been untrodden by man for whole generations. Yet there were moments when it seemed clear to me that the house was not uninhabited, as if some human presence lurked behind the hateful mask. At one time I fancied I heard something like singing, but of this I was not sure. When evening fell I wandered out, weary of watching, to get some food and to reflect on my next course. I sat in the club smoking for some hours, trying to decide upon a plan of action, and half inclined to give up the whole business and forget the crescent and its barricaded house. But the very circles of smoke that floated about me seemed to take shape and form themselves into a gloomy building, whose shuttered windows mocked me defiantly for my inability to learn what lay hid behind them. I wandered out into the night, and of course my feet led me to my new home. I entered, went upstairs, and stationed myself at the front window staring into the street. As the room was perfectly dark behind me, I knew that I could not be observed, and I waited patiently wondering if the Professor would again make his appearance. The hour was late, and I waited so long that I began to think he must either have come already, or did not intend to appear that night, when I heard a quick tread in the deserted crescent, and in a moment I became aware that Professor Petrus was standing on the door-step of the strange house. I heard the faint scratch of his key in the lock, then the door opened and closed quietly, and the street was again given over to silence. I lingered for some few minutes at my post, my heart beating quickly with surprise and excitement; then I passed into the back room, and softly opening my window, leaned far out into the night, hoping to catch some sound in the strange place. The night was quiet as a nun, and the sky was of that deep bright blue which had always seemed to me so Eastern and therefore so lovely, long before I had ever slept beneath an Oriental heaven. There was a faint wind which lightly stirred the trees in my garden and their leafy companions all down the crescent. From the backs of neighbouring houses occasional sounds were borne, and here and there a lighted window told of a lonely student perhaps preparing to pass a white night over his books, or some belated servant working off the arrears of her day's labours. But from the place which alone interested me upon that fair spring night there came no sound. Had it been a tomb into which Professor Petrus had entered to pay his silent devotion to the silent dead, it could not have seemed more still. I waited for long, dead to the beauty of the hour, intent only on my senseless, shameless curiosity. At length, wearied out, I went into the little front room and flung myself upon its cheerless horsehair sofa. I

did not go to bed, for I wished, if I could, to outwatch the night that might still hold some clue to offer me, and I did not light my lamp lest by chance it might suggest to any one inside the house who might yet go out, that there were late watchers next door. Yet, tired of thinking and watching, I had almost fallen asleep, when the faint sound as of a softly opened door aroused me to instant and painful wakefulness. I sprang to my window. A figure was passing down the street in the grey light of advancing dawn. I knew it at once to be that of Professor Petrus.

‘I stood at the window long after the Professor’s form had passed from sight, and the last sound of his footfall had died away from the quiet crescent. The air seemed thick with mystery, and for a moment I felt as if I should abandon my quest and forget, if I could, that I had ever penetrated so far into the hidden life of another man. With this feeling strong upon me, and all feelings are strong in the pale dawn, I got to bed, and fell into a heavy sleep. It was late when I awoke, and the bright spring morning had already long warmed with its sunlight the dingy crescent and the dilapidated gardens. At first I scarcely knew where I was. Then I recalled the new purpose I had set myself, and the strange events of the preceding night. I flung open the window, and stared out into the garden. One of the servants of my lodging house was sweeping the flagged portion by the back steps beneath me, and in a distant garden I could hear the voices of children at play, and catch glimpses of their forms as they chased each other over the patch of earth that was to them a boundless territory. But in the mysterious house all was silent. I felt that, come what might, I should somehow or other get inside that house. I did not stop to reflect that my impertinent curiosity had no justification whatever, I only felt the anxiety of a baffled purpose, and a wish to gratify a keenly roused curiosity. How was this to be accomplished? Clearly not in the daytime. No less clearly not in the night. If Professor Petrus’s visits were uninterrupted, my only time then would be after Professor Petrus had gone away. I spent all that day very aimlessly. I tried to work and could hardly manage it. I wrote letters and found them drifting off into meaningless sentences. I went for a walk, but could not walk away from my curiosity. The shadow of Professor Petrus was upon me everywhere I went. How was I to kill the hours till night? I went to a play, and sat it through with difficulty. At last it came to an end, and I was free to return to my lodging. As I was walking along one of the wider streets, crowded at that hour of the night with people coming from music halls and theatres, I fancied that I saw on the other side the form

of Professor Petrus moving quickly along. He was earlier than last night, and I must needs be quick if I wished to reach the crescent before him. I struck hurriedly into a by-street, and ran as quickly as I could. I got to my door breathless, opened it, and was at my window only a few minutes before the step of the Professor came round the corner. A second more and the door was opened and swallowed him up and closed again.

‘How slowly the hours went by. At length, after cycles seemed to have passed away, I heard the opening of the door, and as before I saw Professor Petrus pass out. When he was out of sight and hearing, I proceeded to put into execution the plan I had formed in those hours of expectancy. I stole softly downstairs, opened the back door that led into the garden, and closed it softly behind me. All was still, and darkness yet ruled the sky, for it was but just two o’clock. I heard it strike as I stood there in the little garden, with the night wind blowing upon my hot face. The wall between the gardens was low and easy to scale. A moment and I found myself in the neighbouring garden face to face with the silent dwelling. I fancied that on the second floor a gleam of light shone through the shutters. Cautiously I advanced towards the door that opened into the garden and tried its latch. To my surprise it yielded and opened with a shrill sound of protest from its rusty hinges which set every nerve in my body tingling, and made me strain my sense of hearing to its quickest, to learn if it was answered by any other sounds than the loud and painful beating of my heart. All was quiet and profoundly dark. I advanced a step inside noiselessly, and felt as if I were stepping into a tomb, so drew back with a quick fear that was very real for its second. It was obvious that I could not go on in the dark. I had a little lantern with me, in my room that is, and to get it I should have to cross the wall again and repeat my journey. However, there was no help for it. I climbed the wall and made my way to my room, found the lantern, candle, and matches, stole downstairs again and out into the air. With the lantern held by its ring in my mouth, I crossed the wall and once more pushed the door which I had left wide open. As noiselessly as I could I lit my light and looked about me. I could hardly restrain a cry of surprise as I did so, for the narrow passage was coloured a deep dull red, and was covered with strange designs of Egyptian kings and deities. Below and around them ran the mystic inscriptions which had held from wondering centuries the secrets of the land of Nile. Doors at my right and in front of me led into rooms, kitchens apparently, and obviously made use of, adorned also with the same strange ornamentation. To the left a stone stairway, dark and

narrow, and similarly painted, led up to a hall lit by a swinging lamp. The walls were painted with all the magnificence of an Egyptian temple, the very door, so dingy outside, being adorned with the awful effigy of Amun-Ra himself, while all around the fantastic divinities of the Egyptian Pantheon were displayed in all the splendour and solemnity that the craftsmen of the desert land imparted to their grim gods. Like a man in a *hasheesh* dream I ascended stairs covered with Eastern carpets that completely deadened the sound of my cautious footsteps. All along the walls the weird mythology of Egypt displayed itself in its stately repose and solemn splendour. I came to a landing lit by a lamp that burned with a warm red flame. To the left and in front were rooms separated from the hall by heavy curtains of woven stuff such as might have hung in the halls of the Pharaohs. With trembling hands I drew back one and looked in. All was dark, but a light gleamed through curtains that shut off a room beyond. I fancied I heard a faint sound from within, and with hands trembling with excitement I drew back one of the heavy folds and gazed in. The room was like the interior of an Egyptian temple. On a pile of cushions in a corner of the room lay a woman. Even now as I speak of her the memory of her beauty takes hold of me and seems to burn into my very soul. I saw at once that she was an Egyptian, one of that rare type, beautiful alike in form and face, which is still to be met with in some of the Nilotic villages. She must have been very young, for the Egyptian women fade early, and this woman seemed to me, as she lay there lazily in the warm light, to be in the very spring of youth and grace. But her dress was such as no fellah woman, no dancing girl of Esneh, ever wore. She was clad in the garments of an Egyptian queen, of those Egyptian queens who still live in the tomb-paintings of the Theban Valley, and the papyrus of the scribes. As she lay there with half-closed eyes, her dark beauty enhanced by the strange richness of her attire, she seemed the very ideal of what most people imagine Cleopatra to have been like, of what Cleopatra might have been like, if she had been Egyptian and not Greek, dark of hair and skin, instead of fair as she probably was.

‘I stood for some seconds gazing at her, and vaguely wondering if what I saw was truth or vision. Then I suppose I stirred, for she suddenly sprang up with a low, guttural cry, and stood erect looking at me. There was no sign of fear, or even of wonder in her eyes as she looked at me, quite still and silent for some brief interval of time. Then she asked rapidly in Arabic, ‘Who are you? Are you a friend of my lord?’ Even then I knew Arabic,

not as I know it now, but well enough to make myself understood by fellaheen and bedaween. I hardly know what I answered, some incoherent phrases bidding her not to be alarmed ; I was a friend of her lord's, and all was well. You may smile if you please, but from the moment I saw her I was completely conquered by her exquisite loveliness. I had been in love many times before, and had often pleased myself and others with a pretence of being in love, but never before had my whole being been drowned in such a flood of passion. With me then to love was to tell it, and I told her. One may make love in Arabic very delightfully, and I was terribly in earnest. You have read Théophile Gautier's wonderful "*Nuit de Cléopâtre*" ? The magic of that story was real for me once ; then. You must remember that I was a young man in those days, and not the elderly individual you are familiar with. Love, too, has a stronger and quicker sway with Eastern women than with our colder Occidentals. Those beauties of the "*Alf Lailah*" who love so passionately at a single glance are still possible in the cities where I live my life. But Dinarizade in London—that was the marvel.

. . . . .  
' I never knew how I got back to my own home. I must have got back to my lodgings and left them and walked to my hotel. I remember nothing. I only remember waking up one morning to find that I had been delirious for some days, that the fever which had threatened me had suddenly passed away. I suppose that the strange excitement under which I had been living had acted on a frame weakened by illness and brought on a brief fever. All that was certain was that I had been ill and was well again. Curiously, I was quite uncertain whether the Egyptian dwelling and the beautiful woman prisoned within it like Rhodope in the pyramid was actual reality or the shifting fancy of a fever-dream. Naturally, my first use of my recovered health was to walk to the crescent. There indeed was the shuttered house. Next door was the dwelling where I had taken rooms. When I rang the bell, the people of the house were not at all surprised to see me, and suffered me to go to my rooms unquestioned. So much then was true.

' As soon as it was dusk I glided into the garden, and scaled the wall again. Once again the door gave way before the pressure of my hand. Once again I found myself in the mysterious dwelling. Its mystery was not the creation of a feverous dream. On the walls the strange Egyptian gods still throned in solemn majesty ; everywhere ran the bewildering hieroglyphics which held no secrets from the eyes of Professor Petrus. I crept softly up the stairs to

the first floor. As I was about to pass into the hall I heard a noise at the front door. I crouched back in the shadow as I saw the door open; the effigy of Amun-Ra swung slowly inwards, and Professor Petrus himself appeared on the threshold. Noiselessly he closed the door again, and slowly ascended the stairs leading to the upper rooms. I felt as if I should choke with excitement, I may say with fear, for the place and the man were fearful enough, and strange noises seemed to beat against my ears. But I would not go back. As noiselessly as Professor Petrus himself, I crept up the thickly carpeted stairs. Cautiously I lifted the curtain of the first room, and looked in. All was silent as before, intensely dark, but a gleam of light came through the curtain that shut off the room beyond. Petrus must be in the farther room—with her. On tiptoe I crossed the room and stood for a moment breathless in front of the heavy curtain that hung down before it and separated it from its gloomy antechamber.

‘There was no sound within, yet I felt sure that he was there. What could it mean? I did not dare to part the curtain, but drawing out my knife I made a quick cut in it sufficiently long to enable me to see with no danger of being seen. Oh, the agony of that moment is upon me now, as I think of it. In the centre of the room was a long low black table, and on it lay a human body swathed and enveloped in the mysterious folds that wrap the limbs of Egyptian mummies. The hands were folded on the breast in an attitude of prayer, and the head which was uncovered gazed up to heaven with the lifeless eyes of an embalmed corpse. It was she. . On the swathes of linen endless processions of Egyptian figures wound themselves in fantastic convolutions. The awful effigy of the Sun was upon her breast, and the genii of Amenti bore the emblem of her soul before the eternal judge. In a corner of the room a coloured mummy case with a gilded face grinning in ghastly likeness of the dead woman, awaited its terrible freight. At the foot of the body Professor Petrus stood with folded arms. He was murmuring, almost chanting, to himself words in Arabic to which I listened eagerly; for though I thought I should fall dead, I felt the spirit of life strong within me, and I stood and looked and listened as if I were at a play.

‘The Professor was motionless, all but his lips, and from his lips fell curses, such curses as only Arabs could have thought of, as only an Arab could express. He cursed the unknown foe who had stolen from him his life, and he prayed God to find him out and deliver him into his hands. If he had but known that his enemy was so within a space of him, that but one pluck at the gaudy curtains and he could have had his fingers on my throat, he would

have ceased his curses and found fitter work with me. I know not why even then I did not come forward and denounce myself or him, and so give us both to death in one wild struggle together, with her embalmed body looking on in its mocking mask of death. But, as I told you, I felt like a spectator at a play, and I looked and made no sign. There was a noise below, and I heard the street door open and the tread of men. They would come perhaps into the room where I was. I drew back into the darkness, and Professor Petrus turned from the body and moved towards the curtain which hid me.

‘I crouched into a corner of the darkened room, and he passed by me and called out something to those below, and passed back again, and once more I looked through the curtain. He lifted the body from the long black table and placed it in the mummy case, the lid of which seemed to move back upon a hinge, and fastened with a lock. He locked it and put the key in his pocket. With an effort of strength of which I should not have thought him capable, he lifted up the mummy case and placed it in an oblong wooden box painted of a dull red colour. This too Professor Petrus locked. Then he called out something, and I heard a tread again on the stairs. I crouched back into darkness, and a man came in from outside, a negro, tall and powerful; he passed into the inner room, and in another minute he and Petrus came out carrying the box between them. I heard them go slowly down the stairs; I heard the street door open and shut, and then I heard the sound of wheels driving away.

‘I have never met Professor Petrus again; he has lived, I believe, in Egypt ever since. I heard some strange story of his building a pyramid there, and I, as you know, have been in Constantinople and in Syria since then. There is my story; it is a strange one, but a true one, and I sometimes fancy the Professor’s curse has come true, when I think of that story and the pain it gives me. I am sure it is to be worked out yet. Don’t think that this story I have told you darkens my life. I do not always think of it; I think of it as little as I can. But things bring their fulfilment with them, and Professor Petrus’s curse has to be worked out.’

JUSTIN HUNTLY M<sup>C</sup>CARTHY.

### My Host.

‘I SHALL meet you to-morrow morning at the Three Oaks.’

‘Suppose you don’t?’ she said.

‘Then,’ I answered gaily, ‘you may know that I am dead.’

I was off to spend the night at the house of our neighbour, Mr. Wilde. A mysterious dispensation of Providence had ordained that he should be christened ‘Charles Danton,’ and an equally mysterious whim of his own—so it was generally supposed—had settled him down as the solitary inmate of a tower-like house perched on one of the hills of the Cotswold range.

As Mr. Wilde had driven over to the Mansels’ house, where I was staying, and invited me to accompany him back in his dog-cart to St. Martin’s Tower, his residence, I could hardly do less than accept, though I did not want to lose a day of Helen Mansel’s society, to whom I was engaged.

As we bowled along over those fine hills, with constant peeps of the distant valley of Severn, we chatted pleasantly; my host, if a hermit now, had evidently graduated in the school of the world. His conversation was varied, pithy, full of fact and anecdote, shrewd observation and correct conclusion. His groom looked a surly specimen, but that did not interfere with the pleasure of our drive. About dusk the dog-cart stopped at St. Martin’s Tower.

I had never seen the place before. It was half farm-house, half castle. In mere size it did not deserve to be called a castle. There was one large round tower rising in the centre of the buildings, surmounted with battlements. Beyond this everything was simply modern and red-brick in different styles, as owners had chosen to patch on bit by bit. There was an empty fosse and an attempt at a drawbridge; but the most imposing part of the edifice was its position, crowning a steep hill. It was far removed, too, from any mortal habitation. An ideal hermitage for Mr. Charles Danton Wilde.

The first thing that I noticed in the interior of the house was the apparent absence of domestics. Perhaps the master of the place was not expected home; or perhaps the servants were in some distant part of the building. It was the surly-looking groom who showed me my room. As the dinner-hour approached, at least the hour when most civilised folk are thinking of having dinner, I naturally felt sure I should see Mr. Wilde’s retinue.

Meanwhile there were no signs of the desired event, and my host tried to interest me in his curiosities. He took me from room to room lined with old volumes, hung with weapons from all quarters of the globe, and crowded with antique furniture and tables laden with the spoils of the East. Then he abruptly left me, and I heard him calling 'Robert! Robert!' all over the galleries and passages. No response. Were we deserted, even by the groom, or footman, or whatever he might be?

When my host came back, I noticed a surprising change in his manner. I cannot say what it was precisely, but his tone was more peremptory, less suave. And his talk—it had become quicker, more excited. He talked, and did not wait for me to reply. He laughed loud, and did not seem to notice that I failed to join in his hilarity.

'Do you know that I am an experimentalist in explosives?' he said, turning suddenly round to me.

No, I did not know it. Besides of what earthly interest to me was the information just then? However, he rose from his seat, and linked his arm in mine. Together we threaded a passage, and came to a door that we had not approached before. I was surprised at the dimensions of the apartment now revealed to me. Evidently we were standing at the very centre of the whole building, where the great round tower was situated, which I had already noticed from outside. Most remarkable of all, however, was the manner in which the room, or tower, or whatever it might be called, was furnished. It was exceedingly lofty, and was lighted entirely from a lantern in the roof, and some windows which were let in at an immense height, and which I supposed looked out on to the roof of the rest of the building. Of furniture, properly speaking, there was none whatever. Ranged round the room were sacks, full of some substance which did not reveal itself to exterior view. Higher up, and quite out of reach, were ledges made in the thickness of the wall, and upon which were more sacks, and a curious-looking tank, containing I knew not what.

Mr. Wilde had brought a candle with him. This served to show the most obvious features of the dungeon-like apartment to which we had come. I thought my host would at once begin explaining the uses to which he put the room, and the contents of the numerous sacks gathered against the wall, and on the ledges. Instead of doing so, however, he asked me to hold the candle. He would be back in a minute or two. 'It is so pitchy dark, I must light the other candles,' he explained, and he left the room to do so, shutting the door behind him. In a moment more, he had appeared at a part of the wall twenty feet above the floor, where

a small door opened out on to one of the ledges I have mentioned, and had set light with a taper to one single long wax candle which was burning in a niche in the wall.

‘That won’t throw much light,’ I remarked.

‘You will find it enough,’ he replied. Then he cast what I thought was a peculiar smile down on me, shut the little door in the wall, and I heard his steps coming down the staircase. Instead of coming into the room, however, he seemed to go in another direction; for I heard his foot-falls echoing along the gallery by which we had gained access to the apartment.

There I was, holding the candle, and waiting and wondering. If this were a real powder-room, was not an unprotected candle dangerous? Yet there was one burning in the wall, far out of my reach; and I held another. Instinctively I looked to see that there was no chance of a spark falling. Then I wondered how long it would be before dinner. Then I remembered I had not seen Robert, the repellent groom, for some time. Then I thought of Helen Mansel. And then I thought of going to look for Mr. Wilde.

I tried the door, but it would not open! I turned the handle again and again, pulled violently, but all in vain. I stood back, holding the candle high above my head, to see if there was any obstruction to the door’s opening. Then I tried again, using all my strength, but the heavy panels resisted my efforts. Turn and twist the handle as I would, I could not produce the slightest effect.

I think human nature is very trusting. I know that even at that moment I hardly suspected Wilde of having really planned to lock me into this room. It might be a practical joke, but even that hypothesis I could not bring myself to accept. Surely my strange entertainer would return in a minute or two, would explain the trick or catch in the door which had made me a prisoner, and we should emerge, ascend to some well-lighted dining-room; find dinner awaiting us, and all would yet turn out well.

But the minutes passed, and the silence was simply oppressive. I listened with anxiety, and soon with real alarm, to catch the sound of Wilde’s steps approaching my door. As nothing was audible, I turned to examine the place where I was, to see if I could not release myself. Then it first struck me to investigate the bags lying upon the floor, close to the wall. As there was no chair, it seemed probable that one of these large bundles would serve as my sitting-place until my host chose to liberate me.

I undid the string fastening of one of the bags, and looked in.

I took out on to my hand some of the fine black dust which it contained, having first taken the precaution to place the candle on the floor some yards off. Yes, there could be no doubt about the nature of the contents of the bag. It was gunpowder.

I then counted the bags. There were twelve in all, upon the floor. But above these, on the ledges, were ranged another set of similar receptacles, and these I could not reach to examine. Nor could I get at the mysterious tank lying in one part of the topmost shelf, close to the still-burning candle.

'Heaven help me!' I could not help exclaiming, as my sight suddenly fixed itself upon that candle, so close to the powder-bags, so close, too, to the tank with its unknown contents. He had called himself an experimentalist in explosives, and I shuddered to think what that tank would reveal if I could look down into it.

Just then, I caught sight of what froze the blood in my veins. Not till that moment had I ceased to believe that the whole adventure might turn out to be the result of some foolish mistake. During that ride over in the dog-cart, my host had told me of an incident which had once occurred to him in the Maldives, which began with seeming peril, and ended in a trumpery fiasco. I was not in the Maldives, but in orderly England, where one is so accustomed to everything going on smoothly, that the idea of danger seems almost absurd. Why on earth should I be singled out for anything unpleasant?

Yet, there, without doubt, stretching from the base of the candle to the lip of one of the bags, was a *thin black line*. I knew what a train of powder looks like; this was high up, but I felt certain of its nature. If I was correct, I might count the minutes between me and death.

As I rushed to the door once again, and strove with furious power to shake it off its iron hinges, thought suddenly became preternatural in its vividness. The whole scene of to-morrow flashed on my brain: Helen waiting anxiously at the 'Three Oaks,' wondering why I did not come. I remembered my words, 'If I don't come I shall be dead.' Hasty, foolish words they had been. But were they to be fulfilled to the very letter?

Curiously enough, after that first burst of a passionate desire for life, which had hurled me against the iron-bound door, I became perfectly tranquil and collected. I even sat down on the bag nearest the door, and began to seriously examine my position.

At first I gave no thought to the villainy which had entrapped me into this place under pretence of hospitality, and which was

preserving me for a horrible death. I hardly for a moment took the trouble to ask what were Wilde's motives, or what the groom was doing, and where his master had fled to. In my inmost thought I cursed him, boy as I was, for plotting to rob me of life and love. But all my faculties turned now with a rebound to the question—could I not by some means or other effect an escape from this horrible condemned cell, in which I found myself?

Mechanically my glance wandered round the walls. They were of rough stone, very old—I judged from their appearance—and there was not a foothold anywhere on their bare surface. I walked all round the walls, examining them carefully, first having taken the precaution to place my own piece of candle as far from the gunpowder as I possibly could.

The prospects of escape at once appeared to me well-nigh hopeless. The door by which I had come in was the sole means of entering the apartment. The windows must have been from thirty to thirty-five feet above the level of the floor. If I could but reach the top ledge running round the wall, I should be saved. And why? Because from there I could creep round to where the powder-train was laid to the fatal candle, still in its niche; I could disconnect the train carefully, put out the light, and then wait—in darkness, it is true, and loneliness—but I *could* wait till succour arrived.

I knew that if I could survive till the next day, my non-appearance to meet Helen would raise the alarm, Mr. Mansel and others would come over to St. Martin's Tower to make enquiries about me; they would find the place deserted, they would shout, and make their way in, and I should be found—I should be safe!

Now I prepared for the effort to scale the walls—my only chance. At first I thought of taking my handkerchief, tying it into a knot, and throwing it till by a lucky shot I managed to extinguish the light. But the danger of scattering a spark, or of bringing the candle down with a run on to one of the powder-bags, or into the tank, put it out of the question.

My only plan was to pile the great powder-bags one on the other as high as they would reach, and then climb to the top. For an hour I was engaged in this task, working literally for dear life. I have never worked so hard before or since. But the fear of death is a stimulant to the nerves which outdoes all other stimulants whatsoever.

By dint of terrible exertions, I managed to rear the bags at least ten feet high. From the summit of this extemporised mountain I should be able to grasp the edge of the lower ledge, and perhaps draw myself up on to it. I began the ascent slowly;

I knew the danger of treading heavily on powder, and I trod as lightly as ever I could. The top of the first bag served me as a foothold. Then from that I reached up to the top of the second, and so drew myself gradually up. I had reached in this manner quite six or eight feet from the ground, and was inwardly congratulating myself on the unexpected progress I had made, when my foot slipped. I must have slid or fallen backwards to the ground, and the shock must have produced unconsciousness for a considerable time.

When I came to myself, I was lying on the cold stone floor of my prison, with a feeling of terrible fatigue in all my limbs. Was it fatigue or what? I stirred myself, and suddenly every bone in my body seemed to respond in frightful twitches of agony. This at once brought me to a full sense of where I was. I raised myself with difficulty to a sitting posture, and looked round.

I was in nearly complete darkness. The candle with which Wilde had lighted me along the passages and into the room had been a short one, and now it had gone entirely out. There was no light except what came from the other candle burning steadily far up on the wall, and above that the fitful moon-radiance which penetrated through the lofty windows at the top of the tower.

There, on these cold flags, surrounded with an amount of explosives sufficient, I knew well, to hurl me into eternity in a second of time, and utterly unable to scale the wall so as to extinguish the candle which was now burning low down to meet the fatal train, I met the king of terrors face to face. I clasped my hands in prayer, and as I did so I felt the cold perspiration making them damp and clammy. Truly, never till that moment had I realised what that expression meant, 'the bitterness of death.' And the idea which haunted me above all others, even above the idea of my poor mother and the terrible grief she would suffer at my loss, was the vision of Helen at the Three Oaks the next morning, waiting for me to come every instant, and waiting in vain.

Oh, could some kind spirit but carry my last messages to her! What was she doing at that very moment, as I lay on that cold floor? If she knew my position, would she not have flown on the wings of the wind to help me, to rescue me?

Then I shouted aloud. I raved at the door, put my mouth to the keyhole, and shouted till I was hoarse. I threw my whole weight again and again at the panels, and then I listened to hear if my frantic exertions produced no kind of echo or response in the building. But the appalling silence settled round me again after every shout, every struggle. I was left to die alone.

I became, I remember, quite calm after a time. It was agony

of mind before ; now it was simple despair that I was enduring. I surveyed the whole situation quietly and dispassionately, as if I were a mere spectator of my own death. It was evidently a case of deliberate, planned murder, of a peculiarly diabolical kind, because of the slow preliminary torture to which my assassin had condemned me. His groom, I supposed, he must have paid to get out of the way, and so I was fairly entrapped without a chance of deliverance.

Then all my attention became fixed on the candle in its socket in the wall. It had burned down excessively low. Even now the hot wax was trickling down on to the stone ; I rose half-upright to watch the dreadful sign. Would the mere heat of the wax ignite the powder ? At the best I had not an hour, perhaps not half-an-hour, to live. As the dreadful certainty swept across my brain, I shouted, I screamed, ' Help ! ' with all my might. Ah ! what sound was that ? Oh, heavens, was I deluding myself at that awful moment ?

Again and again I shouted, and now desperation gave me new strength, and forgetting my bruised limbs, I flung my body against the door and raved in horrible agony. Then I saw the wick above me give a flare—I know not to this moment whether it really did so, or whether the appearance was the result of a feverishly-excited brain. But I uttered a last scream, and swooned.

That is all I recollect until I must have awoke, and, wonderful to relate, found myself still lying on that stone floor, but with bright lights about me, and supported in somebody's arms, who was pouring brandy down my throat. I turned my eyes to his face, and saw that it was the surly-visaged groom !

' Thank Heaven I was in time ! ' he muttered.

I was too weak to answer, or to ask for any explanation then. But afterwards the mystery of Wilde's conduct was explained to me. Unknown to anybody in the neighbourhood, Charles Danton Wilde was simply a well-conducted and generally harmless madman, who had been placed by friends in this solitary residence, in order to preserve the secret of his sad mental condition. The groom was in reality a kind of amateur keeper. What I mistook for sulkiness was really a very natural apprehension of the effects of my visit to St. Martin's Tower. Mr. Wilde never entertained company. The man told me that he had watched his master carefully in the drive, and had noticed what he believed to be the signs of increased and dangerous mania in his eyes and manner.

He had not deserted me. He had merely gone off to the nearest village to get assistance. It was he who rushed into the building just when the candle light was guttering down to meet

the powder train, and rescued me from destruction. Of course it was a piece of folly on the man's part to allow his master to take to such a dangerous toy as gunpowder. But Mr. Wilde, his groom asserted, was always exceedingly and nervously careful about the explosives which he used.

I believe his relations heard of the affair ; at all events neither I nor Helen ever set eyes on Mr. Charles Danton Wilde again, and for aught I know he may be 'experimenting in explosives' in some other part of the world, perhaps in the Maldives. More probably he has been long ago prevented from ever inflicting on any human being such a terrible spell of agony as he once gave to myself.

H. F. LESTER.

## A Night at the 'Hôtel des Morts.'

THE 'High Level Route' is the name that Alpine climbers have given to the passage between Chamouny and Zermatt over the glaciers which lie between those two points. It is a passage of remarkable beauty, for it includes some of the finest ice scenery in all the Alps.

The route is capable of several variations, for there are many passes over the chain leading in the same direction; but the route usually adopted, I believe—taking Chamouny as a starting-point—is over the Cols d'Argentière, de Sonadon, du Crêt, the Pas de Chèvres, the Col de Berthol, and the Col d'Hèreus.

Substituting the Col du Géant and the Col Ferret for the Col d'Argentière, I was 'doing' the 'High Level Route' when the strange adventure I am about to relate happened to me. It is now some years since it occurred, but the unpleasant impression created at the time remains, and seems likely to remain.

One lovely summer's afternoon—the date is of no consequence—I left Chamouny and walked up the hot and dusty path to the wretched *cabane* which at that time did duty as the 'Hôtel du Montenvert.'

For some days past the weather had been unusually sultry, and in order to avoid the mid-day heat when crossing the snowfields of the Col du Géant, I had arranged with my guides to make a start from the Montenvert at midnight, and as it was full moon at the time, we counted upon having as much light as we should require.

I had two guides with me—one, the same that I had always had from the time when I first began to climb, some years previously; the other, a man who had made a name for himself for skilful and daring rock-climbing. He, though, was to be with me but a short while longer, as he had another engagement to fulfil in the course of a day or two.

For some three hours I made an attempt to sleep, and then I arose and feebly tried to swallow a few mouthfuls of bread; but at an hour bordering on midnight it is not easy to get up an appetite for breakfast, and I soon gave up in despair and went out to see if my men were ready.

An extraordinary stillness prevailed. From off the Mer de Glace a cool breeze was blowing, giving evidence of the frost that had frozen dry the little rills and streamlets intersecting the glacier, which all that day long had been running musically; and yet,

though the breeze blew freshly on my cheek, it was scarce sufficient to give motion, for on the pine trees and shrubs close beside me not a leaf was stirring. A soft pale light in the sky behind the Grandes Jorasses showed that the moon would soon be up.

Close upon the witching hour, equipped in heavy marching order, wearing each his knapsack, we left the hotel and made our way down the tourist-trod path towards the Mer de Glace. Without mishap, although it was still very dark and the track not too well defined, we reached the ice, and then commenced one of the most impressive walks I have ever undertaken in the Alps, for we made our way up the Mer de Glace in brilliant moonlight. The moon had risen by this time, and was shining down upon us from behind the dark and frowning mass of the Grandes Jorasses. As its rays fell upon it the frozen surface of the glacier sparkled and glittered, and the towering *séracs* of the great ice-fall in front of us rose weird and mysterious in their strange fantastic forms as the pale unearthly light fell upon them.

It was like a scene from fairyland, and the impression was heightened by the stillness which reigned, only broken by the grating sound of our own footsteps as we trod the ice.

Too much awed by the extraordinary beauty of the scene to exchange a word, we walked leisurely on till we halted to rest before commencing the ascent of the *séracs*.

The sky was becoming lighter now, and soon a faint crimson flush spread over it, paling the moonlight into insignificance, and changing the appearance of everything so completely that the fairy scene we had just witnessed passed away from us as though it had been a dream.

But the sunrise, too, was very beautiful, by its glory compensating us for the loss; and, with weather such as rarely falls to a climber's lot, we crossed the Col, and descended easily to the little inn on the Mont Fréty, half-way down to the valley.

Here we passed a quiet afternoon, but at midnight we were once more on the tramp, and again blessed by the most glorious weather, we crossed the Col Ferret and descended to Orsières, a small village on the St. Bernard route.

Here my second guide left me, and with my other man (whom I will call Franz) I went on to Bourg St. Pierre, over the route traversed by the Great Emperor with his 'Army of Italy.'

Tradition has it that it was at the inn here that Napoleon halted to breakfast; and to this day, in memory of the event, it bears on its signboard the inscription, 'Hôtel du déjeuner de Napoléon I<sup>er</sup>.'

It had become necessary for us to obtain another man to do

duty as porter, two being an insufficient number for crossing the Col de Sonadon (for which we were bound next day), this being, perhaps, the most difficult pass on the 'High Level Route.'

With some little trouble one was at length found, but I did not like the look of him, and had I not had the utmost confidence in Franz, I should have thought twice before engaging him. He was nothing better to look at than a clumsy peasant, and he reeked unpleasantly of stale spirits and suchlike abominations—just the kind of man, in fact, that one would not care to be alone with in moments of difficulty or danger. However, as no one else was available, we were constrained to make the best of him.

We started for the Col de Sonadon soon after two o'clock the following morning.

After two such glorious days in succession, it was too much to expect, in the mountains, that we should have a third; and soon after the start, although the sky, for the most part, was quite clear, a bank of heavy cloud hung upon the horizon, and gathered in blackness and density the farther we went.

For some time our way lay through pasture land, barren enough in appearance, but yielding sufficient, perhaps, for the few lean kine scattered over it; and then we went over more rocky ground, which bore traces of having been at one time a great moraine.

Next we mounted some steep rock gullies, affording to Franz and myself a pleasant bit of climbing, but filling the porter's heart with dismay. We had not misjudged him. In any difficulty he showed himself, to use an expressive bit of slang, 'out of it,' and Franz had many a time to call him to order.

Then we passed on to the Sonadon glacier. The scene was a singularly wild and beautiful one. Right above us towered the Grand Combin, upwards of 14,000 feet in height, the highest of its group, and indeed ranking amongst the mightiest of the whole Alps. Nigh at hand rose the Mont Vélan, always a striking object from the neighbourhood of the St. Bernard; and all around us snow and grey barren rock gave to the landscape that wild, inhospitable look that I associate more than any other with this particular district.

I was a very energetic climber in those days, and many an expedition I had planned and carried out which in these I should hesitate about attempting. I had long wished to make the ascent of the Combin, and now that I was actually in reach of it I thought my chance had come. It mattered little that the Col de Sonadon by itself is considered a long expedition, and without hesitation I made the suggestion to Franz that we should combine the ascent of the peak with the passage of the Col.

In spite of the threatening appearance of the sky the weather still kept fine, and after a few moments' reflection Franz, who always fell in with my plans when not *too* unreasonable, agreed; 'but,' he added, 'we must be quick about it.'

The porter looked on with open mouth, and when it was told him what we meant to do he flatly declined to go with us. 'You may try to reach the top,' he exclaimed, with an air as if to say, 'You are fools if you think you will ever get there.' 'But not I! —*pas si bête!*'

And so we left him with a few caustic remarks, and struck off for the ascent of the Combin, telling him to wend his way to some rocks hard by the summit of the pass and there wait for our return. Had I known, though, what was before us I should not have set off with so light a heart.

The weather, the higher we got, kept getting more and more unsettled, and Franz several times looked uneasy, and muttered 'Quicker! quicker!' but we kept steadily climbing upwards till we reached the top of the ridge leading straight to the summit, which was now not far distant.

No sooner, though, did we set foot on this ridge than a violent clap of thunder broke over our heads. Instantly a cloud swept down upon us, and before we could realise what was coming we were in the thick of a terrific snowstorm.

It was one of those sudden atmospheric changes that constitute one of the few *real* dangers of climbing.

That climbing is dangerous in itself those who do not know much about the matter are continually insisting, but those who try it for many years, as I have, get to learn that in nearly every instance the danger is created by the persons who climb, for it is to their own action alone that must be attributed most of the fatal accidents that have happened to Alpine climbers.

To have the summit within our grasp and yet not to reach it was more than we could bear, and so, shutting our eyes to the risk we ran, we seized the opportunity of a lull in the storm to make a push for it. Every moment the violence of the storm increased, and when we stood upon the highest point—which we knew to be so only by the fact of the ground falling away rapidly on the opposite side from which we ascended—we could scarcely see a foot in front of us, so thickly fell the snow. The thunder roared incessantly—flash succeeded flash, and our ice-axes began to give out a weird, humming sound, as if bewitched. We seemed to be in the thick of an electric current. There was something awful in our position. It was true we had reached the top, but should we ever get down again?

The howl of the storm was appalling. Not a word could we hear ourselves speak, and it was only by signs that Franz made me aware that I was to descend first.

I pushed on downwards as rapidly as I could ; but the hail, driving into my face, seemed to cut me to pieces, and at every few steps I had to pause to take breath.

By good luck, more than anything else, at last we reached the edge of the cliff by which we had ascended and looked over.

The face of the cliff was very steep, and the whole force of the storm seemed to be beating against this side of the mountain, and by this side we must descend if we meant to get down at all.

The position was certainly one calculated to try the nerves. Immediate action was necessary, for the violence of the storm, so far from abating, seemed rather to increase. The crash of the thunder, which seemed to break immediately above us, was deafening ; the lightning danced about, leaping playfully from crag to crag, while snow and hail pelted against us more heavily than ever. Franz drew me beside him, and, shortening the rope which linked us together, pointed over the edge and shouted two words in my ear—'Lead down !'

For one moment I looked ; the next, knowing the longer I did this the less I should like the prospect, I stepped over the edge.

In an instant the wind caught me and blew me hard against the side of the mountain, but I clutched the rocks like grim death, and worked slowly and with difficulty downwards, the wind all the while tearing at my clothes, which flapped about in such a way that I feared every instant they might be rent in pieces.

It was certainly the most awful experience I ever went through in the Alps, and to this day I marvel how we got down, but get down we did, somehow.

As we descended, picking our way painfully down the ice-coated rocks and helping each other as best we could, the storm decreased, and finally, but for a few flakes of snow floating about the air, ceased, as far as we were concerned, but still we heard the thunder growling away over the summit of the Combin, which remained hidden from our sight in impenetrable mist. Safe ourselves, our next care was the porter. We had shouted to him several times on the way down, but nothing but the echo of our own voices came back to us, and we began to wonder what had become of him. We saw no trace of him on the glacier or by the rocks at the summit of the pass, and though we kept shouting continually no answer was returned.

We hurried on to the rocks, but still not a vestige of him could we see, till at last, after searching up and down, we came upon

him, crouched beneath a big boulder fast asleep, and with the *débris* of a substantial meal strewn thick around him. We shook him and he awoke.

All this time we had been fasting, and now it dawned upon us that we had become very hungry indeed. Franz's foresight had provided us with a goodly stock of provisions before leaving Bourg St. Pierre, and we called upon the porter, somewhat impatiently perhaps, to produce the knapsack containing them. But a most unaccountable delay attended its production, and when at last it did appear its surprising lightness was ominous of evil.

Franz tore open the sack and fumbled within. His search was rewarded, first by a handful of paper, then by an empty bottle, then by more paper, and lastly by a moist and hairy crust of bread and a morsel of cheese rind!

It was more than human nature could endure, and when the porter naïvely remarked that, rather than let such good provisions be wasted (?) (for he knew that we must be lost), he thought he might as well set to work to reduce them, our indignation knew no bounds. In charity I will draw a veil over what followed, for I fear our pent-up wrath broke forth in an unlimited form. But be that as it may, for any effect that our words had upon him the porter might have been made of adamant! Revenge is sweet, and we were to have ours before the day was over, for in descending the glacier on the other side of the pass the porter fell into a deep crevasse, and it was only after much difficulty and some risk that we pulled him out, and then his face showed such abject terror that we actually felt some degree of pity for him.

He was very meek and subdued for the rest of the day after this adventure. We had hard work in getting off the glacier, for we found it in a bad state, intersected with innumerable crevasses, and in many places difficult to cross. It was, accordingly, evening before we left the ice and descended into the wild rocky valley into the head of which the glacier came down.

Hitherto I have given their true names to the places I have described, but for obvious reasons I must now 'dissemble,' and in calling this valley the 'Vallée des Morts' I am giving it a name by which no one will recognise it.

We meant to reach an inn which, it was said, existed in the neighbourhood, but it was in such an out-of-the-way spot that very little information had we been able to get on the subject, and Franz and the porter, from not having been in these parts previously, were equally in doubt as to where we should find it.

Night was coming fast upon us. A good deal of mist still hung about the mountain tops and over the valley, and the growing

darkness showed that the day was nearly done. The Vallée des Morts—so named on account of its having been the scene of a violent struggle between Suwarrow and the French in 1799, in which the loss of life had been terrible—is a peculiarly wild and gloomy spot. Almost completely shut in by lofty precipices, but little sun can ever reach it, and as we saw it that evening in the declining light of day, its gloom reminded me strangely of an illustration I had once seen from Dante's 'Inferno.'

Presently the sky became a little lighter, for the moon rose, and through the white mists its orb shone dimly and hazily down upon us. We walked quickly, but we had difficulty at times in picking our way in the semi-darkness amongst the rocks and stones that littered the valley, and by-and-by we came to what looked to be a track of some kind. It was but a faint one, made probably by cattle, but it showed that a human habitation must be near, and we cheerfully followed it.

The path mounted slightly, and soon it brought us to an open space—a small grass-clad plateau, and at one end of this rose ghostly in the mist a form of white, which as we drew near resolved itself into the front of a narrow stone building. It was what we wanted, sure enough. Franz made straight for the door, and with the point of his ice-axe rapped loudly. The sound rang hollowly through the building as though it were deserted, and indeed so it appeared to be, for no answer came.

We stepped back and looked. How lonely the place seemed! No sign of life about it, for every window was closely barred by shutters which in many instances seemed falling to pieces with age and neglect. An antiquated signboard hung over the porch, upon which we made out with difficulty the inscription, 'Hôtel des Morts.'

Scarcely a cheerful name it seemed to us, but we could not help thinking it appropriate, for it might indeed have been a house of the dead, so silent and still was everything within. Again Franz knocked, yet more loudly, and then, after an interval, we heard steps slowly coming down the passage leading to the door. A rattling of bolts and chains followed, the door half opened, and the face of a very withered wrinkled old man peered through.

'From the time you kept us waiting, old fellow, one would think you hadn't many visitors,' exclaimed Franz, as we pushed our way into the house. The old man's face brightened. He seemed relieved.

'Ah! I see,' he said. '*Messieurs les voyageurs. Bon!* I thought—but no matter, no matter.'

We entered. Gloomy as the inn looked from the outside, it

seemed gloomier still within, and it struck chilly even after the cold and dampness of the mist without.

I was tired out by this time, and, cutting short the conversation. I requested our host to get me something to eat at once, for I was longing to be off to bed. For three successive nights I had had no rest to speak of. He brought me some hot coffee and bread. It was all he could give me, but I was thankful for that, and after making a scanty meal I asked to be taken to my room. The old man bade me follow him, and he led me to a door opening on to the passage on the ground floor, which he threw open for me to pass through.

I entered a cold and comfortless apartment, squalid in appearance, very bare of furniture—containing, in fact, no more than was absolutely necessary. No carpet covered the floor, and altogether it looked a poverty-stricken place.

Two wooden bedsteads were placed alongside the wall, foot to foot—one close by the window, the other in a line with it, and this latter I chose.

I wished the old man '*bon soir*,' but he stood in the doorway in a hesitating kind of way, as if he wished to say something. 'Monsieur,' at last he said, 'we have but scanty room here, and——'

That was of no consequence, I told him. I had roughed it many a time before, and did not mind that.

'It is not that, monsieur. There come *voyageurs* sometimes—*voyageurs* who arrive late. Would monsieur pardon the request he would make? If a *voyageur* should come, might he—would monsieur mind that he should take the other bed?'

'If that was all,' I told him, 'take the other bed by all means; only don't disturb monsieur—monsieur is fatigued.'

'A thousand thanks. Then if monsieur should wake in the night he will not fear to see that the other bed is occupied.'

Again he seemed to hesitate, but I bade him '*bon soir*' in a manner that showed him I meant it, and he went out and closed the door. Five minutes after I was between the blankets.

And now comes the odd part of my story. I had thought myself scarcely likely to need rocking when I got to bed, but, tired as I undoubtedly was, I could not get to sleep, and tossed about in a semi-conscious condition.

This may have gone on for a long or short time. I cannot tell. All I know is that I was suddenly wide awake and sitting up in bed.

A brilliant moonlight was shining into the room. Outside the mists had almost dispersed, for nothing but a thin haze hung

for a few feet above the ground. The distance was quite clear, and snow-field and glacier showed dimly but distinctly in the soft light. A truly lovely scene.

But it was not that which attracted me. The moonlight was falling full upon the other bed, for the shutters had swung back from their fastenings, and where the light fell it was almost bright as day.

And there upon the bed I saw the outline of a figure.

It was that of some one tall and very thin. Wrapped in a blanket, he lay, one arm supporting the head, which, so raised, brought the face into the full gleam of the moonlight. And, great Heaven! what did I see?

A face so inexpressibly horrible that in the agony of that moment I almost shouted aloud!

It was the face of a man apparently past the prime of life, but strangely sunken in feature, and so dark of complexion that he might almost have been born under an African sky.

A quantity of black hair, tinged here and there with grey, grew about the mouth and chin, but did not conceal the expression, and this it was that startled me.

Never before had I seen anything so diabolical. The eyes were so sunken that I could scarcely tell in the dim light whether or not they were closed, but the lips were drawn up and exposed the teeth, so as to give the face an appearance as if it were grinning at me—so much so, indeed, that I feared each moment to hear a peal of unearthly laughter break from those hideous jaws.

But the figure remained so extraordinarily motionless that I felt it must be sleeping.

Only once had I seen anything approaching this ghastly object, and that was in the Morgue at the Hospice of the St. Bernard. An Italian labourer had been found by the monks frozen to death on the pass, and they had placed the body in the Morgue, where it remained standing leaning on its staff, preserved from decay by the coldness of the atmosphere—the face, scarcely more than the skull when I saw it, looking forward and seeming to grin in hideous mockery of the death that had overtaken it.

The face of the occupier of the other bed reminded me strangely of this one, and indeed so horrible, so awful did this vision at length become to me that I think I must have swooned from the sight of it, for I do not remember more till, with the early sunlight shining in at the window, I woke.

I at once looked at the other bed. It was unoccupied, and strange to say, when I went up and examined it more closely, it had the appearance of not having been slept on at all.

I was up and dressed before Franz came to tell me it was time to be stirring, and I went outside for a breath of the morning air.

What a splendid morning that was! But, though I stood there in the full glory of the golden sunlight, with the dew glistening on the stunted blades of grass beneath my feet and the snow peaks above me shining like burnished silver, I still felt chilled and unrested, and the vision of that awful face seemed again to rise before me, and damp the gladness that I should have felt at any other time at so bright and lovely a scene.

I went in and sat down to breakfast at the open window in the dingy little room that did duty as the *salle-à-manger*.

Our host appeared with the coffee soon after, and when he had placed it on the table he hovered about the room pretending to dust the furniture, but I could see that it was but a pretence, and that he was longing to be saying something to me. At last he summoned courage. 'Monsieur has passed a good night?' he ventured.

'*Pas trop*. And, by the way, what has become of the *voyageur* that was put into monsieur's room?' And then I went on to describe minutely my fellow-traveller's appearance, ending with, 'If you often put such an ugly customer into their rooms, you will soon frighten your guests away, and the place will get a bad name.'

I said this jokingly, although, to tell the truth, the subject did not seem one that I altogether cared to joke about, but the effect on our host was extraordinary. Every vestige of colour—and he had little enough at any time—fled from his wrinkled cheeks, which assumed a dull leaden hue, and had he not grasped the chair in front of him he must have fallen.

I was greatly alarmed, and, fearing he might be ill, rushed to his assistance; but he rallied instantly, and, pushing me aside, tottered out of the room, muttering to himself, 'Ah! it is true, then, it is true! Monsieur has seen it!'

Startled and surprised, at the same time my curiosity was aroused, and I questioned the old man closely to try and get an explanation, but he seemed afraid he had said too much as it was, for it was only very reluctantly that I got him to allude again to the subject.

Soon afterwards—towards six o'clock that morning—we left, and as we strode away I turned and saw the old man watching our retreating figures with a strangely wistful expression, as if in that moment the fearful loneliness of his position had come upon him in all its force.

I could not help pitying him, his life seemed such a solitary

one, and when, from the summit of the ridge we had to cross on our way to Zermatt, I turned and took a last look down at the valley, I thought it appeared more gloomy than ever, for even in that early hour the mountains had cast their shadows across it, and thrown it completely into shade. Then we went on our way, and a load seemed to pass from me when I thought that I was not again to spend the night at the 'Hôtel des Morts.'

I have a great dislike to being 'chaffed,' and therefore I was somewhat chary of telling this adventure; but on one occasion I was relating it to a friend who was very well up in everything connected with the Alps, when, after listening very intently to what I had to tell, he asked me if I had never heard of the story connected with the inn. I told him I had not, and he then went on to say that, many years before, the landlord of the inn, on going to open his house for the summer season (most of these mountain inns are entirely shut up all through the winter), had been horrified to find the dead body of a man in one of the beds.

It never transpired how it came there, but it was believed to be that of a smuggler, who, in trying to cross the frontier, had missed the track, forced his way into the inn for shelter, and there perished miserably.

From the dried and mummified condition of the body it was evident that the man had been frozen to death.

PERCY W. THOMAS.



*The Fairies' Pool.*

## The Fairies' Pool.

THERE'S many a maid, upon Midsummer Day,  
 With bowl or pitcher who takes her way  
 To the laughing valley below the hill  
 Where the Fairies' Pool lies clear and still ;  
 For gossips tell that the lass who drinks  
 At noon of its water, and silently thinks  
 Of a wished-for sweetheart, shall have her will  
 Ere the wheat grows red or the filberts fill.

And surely never was fitter place  
 For a maid to sue for the hill-folks' grace ;  
 Over the cliff in a gleaming flow  
 The stream falls into the burn below,  
 And it flashes away, in laughing play,  
 Through many an eddy and many a bay,  
 Round the boulders and over the sand,  
 Now in a freshet and now on a strand,  
 Till it pauses to rest where, clear and cool,  
 Sleeps in the sunlight the Fairies' Pool.

And who but fair Lettice, and she alone,  
 Should stand this noon on the stepping-stone ?  
 She dips her pitcher, and deeply drinks,  
 And thrice on a well-loved youth she thinks,  
 Young Will of Barton, the yeoman's son,  
 Whose smile sweet Lettice's heart has won,—  
 Nor dreams that a face with brown bright eyes,  
 Close hid in the bushes, her spell espies.

The stream poured down with a noisy glee  
 As Lettice turned round through the copse to flee,  
 The pool seemed brimming above its brink  
 As Will lay down by its side to drink :  
 He has followed her swiftly, and all that day  
 Her singing was blithe as a merle in May ;  
 He has followed her out to the orchard gate  
 And spoken the words that have sealed her fate ;  
 When the red moon hung in the glowing west  
 Her head lay couched on her lover's breast.

## Jack Harris's Hummy.

JACK HARRIS had been passing a delightful afternoon. He had been lunching with Theocritus Marlowe at the 'Smollett,' and between them, over a flagon of Lagrima Cristi, they had settled some of the most complicated of the many problems that vex humanity. Woman and her place in the world was still something of a puzzle to Jack and his friends, and in consequence she was their favourite theme. Most other subjects, human or divine, had long since ceased to interest them; they scorned all creeds and had swallowed all formulas, and were perfectly content with themselves. A stranger, a Philistine, had once reproached Jack Harris with having no religion. 'No religion!' answered Jack scornfully—it was at the Duke of Magdiel's, and he felt specially bound to be epigrammatic in honour of his stately host—'No religion! why, I have seventeen at the least;' a saying which was the admiration of the cultured world for well-nigh a fortnight. On this particular day, when Jack was lunching with Theocritus, the author of 'Women and Graves' permitted himself to indulge in some slight regret that he had never yet, in all his varied and richly coloured experiences of life, encountered any woman who was quite worthy of his complete devotion, quite able to conquer his wandering spirit. 'I am Anthony,' said Jack proudly, 'but where is my Cleopatra?' and he looked sternly through the grey veil of tobacco smoke as he spoke at Theocritus, as if he dimly suspected his heart's brother of hiding the Queen of Egypt away somewhere in the club cellars. But Theocritus only shook his head, and sighed 'Where indeed?' and then dropped off into silence. He was in secret thinking that if a Cleopatra did make her appearance in nineteenth-century London, it would be he, Theocritus Marlowe, and not Jack Harris, whom she would single out to be the victim of her witcheries. But this opinion he wisely kept to himself. No one ventured publicly to contest any statement advanced by the illustrious Harris. As Jack found that Theocritus could not immediately assist him to a new Cleopatra, and as luncheon was over, and there was nothing more to eat or drink, he got up and went away, leaving the half of his soul wreathing himself in the purple clouds of his cigarettes.

On quitting the 'Smollett' Jack lounged for a few minutes into the National Gallery, to see if he could find upon the canvases of Florence or Venice any dead face that might, in the

days when it lived and smiled into the eyes of a Bellini or a Titian, have been worthy the homage of uncompromising Jack Harris. He found none such, however. The Old World was as empty as the New. He sighed. In despair of an ideal he turned his attention to the great Orcagna, to see whether it might not possibly be the work of some other painter. Having made up his mind that everybody else was wrong and that he was right, he left the Gallery and turned towards home in a very pleasant state of mind to dress and go out to dinner. That dinner was somewhat of an event in Jack's life, for it was to take place at the house of Amber Pasha. That famous Anglo-Oriental had just made one of his brief descents upon London society. The caravanserai in Park Lane, where the huge Caryatides of red porphyry gazed eternally over the spreading green of the Park, was for the moment occupied. Amber Pasha, who had the true Oriental willingness to let anyone amuse him, was quite willing to include Jack Harris among the guests at one of the eccentric little dinners to which everyone was eager to be invited, and for which few ever got invitations. Jack had met Amber Pasha at the Duke of Magdiel's immediately after his return from Stamboul, and he had amused the Pasha, and the Pasha asked him to dinner the following week. Jack was in the seventh heaven of delight. He could think of little else but this dinner. Indeed he was so much engrossed by it that, on leaving the National Gallery, instead of making the directest way home to his abode in Chelsea, he allowed himself to drift idly along the streets until he suddenly found himself in the midst of the maze of narrow and dirty streets that intersect Soho. As he looked about him to find the shortest way out of the labyrinth, he saw that he was in the neighbourhood of a particularly shabby little shop, over which the word 'Curiosities' was painted in rusty black Gothic letters on a faded ground of dingy yellow. Jack was fond of curiosities—his own rooms were like an inferior bric-à-brac dealer's—so he looked in at the dirty windows. A few dusty old plates and skulls and battered naval swords were displayed, or rather heaped together in desolate carelessness. None of them were of any value, Jack soon convinced himself, and he was about to go away when his glance fell on a card in a corner, partly hidden by a modern willow-patterned plate, which induced him to pause. The card bore the words, 'A Mummy for Sale Within.' A mummy for sale—that seemed attractive. Jack entered the shop. A dirty woman, who was nursing a dirtier child, asked him what he wanted. He observed that he had come to look at the mummy. Then the woman got up, opened a door at the back, and screeched upstairs for Jacob to

come down. A scuffling noise was heard on the creaky staircase, and Jacob made his appearance, the dirty woman and child retiring by the way down which he had come. Jacob was a small, quick-eyed, foul-habited old man, surveying Jack with the inquiring glance of a malicious magpie.

‘I want to see your mummy,’ said Jack.

Jacob nodded. ‘Come this way,’ he said, and he walked into a back room. Jack followed him, and found himself in the midst of a most extraordinary collection of lumber. There were bits of rusty old armour, which looked as if no cleaning could ever bring them back to brightness. There were broken swords, and specimens of china, and dusty books, and stuffed birds, and in one corner a skeleton was hanging up. But what interested Jack only was the mummy. He saw it at once. It was standing, or rather leaning, against the chimney-piece of the neglected fireplace, which looked as if no fire had ever lent a cheerful glow to its gaunt bars and squalid sides.

‘There she is,’ said Jacob, jerking his head and his right hand towards the mummy.

There she was certainly. Jack saw at once that it was the mummy of a woman, and that it was in a very bad state of preservation. The mummy case was cracked and broken; its gilding was wofully faded; its paintings were almost undecipherable; the strange assemblage of gods and monsters was blurred out of recognition by the touch of time; its lid, which was off, was split almost in halves, and showed the rotting, worm-eaten wood beneath the gaudy ornament. The mummy itself seemed to be mouldering away. At the end the sombre swathes of linen, which had once been white, centuries earlier, had burst, and part of a small and bony foot stuck horridly out, in grisly mockery of mortality. It certainly was not much of a mummy to look at, and Jack felt disappointed. Still it was a mummy, and might, when touched by cunning fingers, look very well in his little collection of treasures.

‘How much?’ he inquired.

‘Ten pounds,’ said Jacob.

‘Ten pounds is too much,’ answered Jack decisively. ‘It is in very bad condition, and it is not worth half.’

‘Ten pounds is the price,’ Jacob replied, while his bright eyes ranged alternately over the mummy and his visitor.

‘It is too much,’ said Jack. ‘Good-morning.’

He was passing over the threshold, when Jacob called him back.

‘Will you give nine?’ he said.

‘No,’ responded Jack, and he again turned to go.

‘Well, you shall have it for eight,’ grunted Jacob, ‘but I can’t take a penny less, and I’m sure a mummy like that’s cheap at the money. Look at her now,’ and he drew his dirty fingers slowly, with a kind of horrible affection, over the coffin-lid, on which the faded lineaments still lingered.

Jack stood for a moment irresolute. ‘It certainly would look very well,’ he thought. ‘I will buy it,’ he announced suddenly. He left his address, told Jacob to send it along at once, and he should receive his money, and then, quitting the noisome shop, made his way rapidly to Chelsea.

Jacob was prompt. Jack had scarcely got to his abode when Jacob arrived, trundling the mummy uncovered upon a handbarrow, followed by a crowd of small boys, who seemed greatly interested in the fantastic object. Amidst the cheers of the little crowd, Jack, assisted by Jacob, got the mummy inside the hall, and up the stairs into Jack’s sitting-room. Jack handed over to Jacob his money, every coin of which Jacob investigated with a kind of gnome-like care. Then Jacob shuffled downstairs, chuckling and grumbling under his breath, the small boys dispersed lingeringly, and Jack was left alone with his treasure. Now that it was his own he felt strangely disappointed with it. The hieroglyphics were almost entirely illegible. He could make nothing of them, which, as he knew no Egyptian, was scarcely surprising, but he could not even distinguish the shapes of Egypt’s dim deities. The case was shockingly dirty and broken. Altogether Jack felt as if he had wasted his money. However, there she was, the money was gone, and he had to make the best of her; so he put her into his bedroom while he was dressing for dinner, and until he could make up his mind what place she should finally occupy among the curiosities that adorned his sitting-room. The traffic had made him somewhat late, so he had to dress hurriedly and to drive quickly, to be in time for his dinner-party. Before the soup was over he had forgotten all about his mummy.

The dinner was delightful, as all dinners at Amber Pasha’s are. Lord Lancelot was there, and Sir Harry Kingscourt, and Ferdinand Lepell, the painter, and Professor Hermann, and one or two others, and Jack was very happy, and in consequence prodigiously eloquent and epigrammatic, and amused his host amazingly. But it is not for us to chronicle all that was said at the banquet; indeed, Jack himself had but a hazy recollection of it all the next morning. It lasted till late. When it was at length breaking up Amber Pasha produced a small box of wrought-silver covered over

with strange inscriptions in Arabic. The box contained cigarettes made of such tobacco, Amber Pasha said, as was seldom smoked outside the seraglio of the Grand Signior. They certainly looked very fascinating as they lay there in their silver case, which contrasted pleasantly with the faint yellowish tinge of their paper. A strange, vague perfume seemed to mount from the box, at once irritating and attractive. Amber Pasha gave a cigarette to each of his guests, only asking them, with a half-smile, not to smoke it just then, but to wait at least till they got home or till the next day. Nobody seemed surprised at the request ; nobody ever was surprised at anything Amber Pasha ever did or said. All promised and all parted.

Jack returned home in a contented frame of mind. As he began to undress his eyes fell upon the mummy standing in the corner of his bedroom, where he had left it. With the good-humour of a man who has dined well and is about to sleep well, he surveyed his purchase with more satisfaction than he had at first experienced. As he meditated his mind turned towards tobacco. To his annoyance he found that the box of cigarettes which stood on his chimney-piece was empty, and he remembered, now that it was too late, that he had smoked the last of them that afternoon and had forgotten to replenish the coffer. He took his case out of his pocket, not very hopefully, for he did not believe that it contained anything. But it did. There lay a solitary cigarette, made of a peculiar yellowish paper and giving out a faint acrid odour. For a moment Jack was puzzled. Then he remembered the parting gift of Amber Pasha, and laughed. 'This is lucky,' he said to himself contentedly, as he struck a match and lit the cigarette. Then, dropping into his rocking-chair, he folded his hands comfortably behind his head and puffed away placidly, and surveyed his mummy. The more he looked the more he liked his purchase. Indeed, it seemed to him as if the hieroglyphics had almost become clearer, and he bent over them for a moment in the fond hope of deciphering something. But his fancied knowledge of the language of the Pharaohs failed him utterly. The painted forms and images which had seemed clear resolved themselves again into inextricable confusion, and he could not decipher a single syllable ; so, with a yawn and a wonder as to what once was the name of the mummied mockery upon humanity, Jack got into bed and fell fast asleep.

He was awakened by the sound of a human voice, which seemed to call him, though his name was not uttered. In a moment he was wide awake. The strange feeling of alarm that any noise at night occasions at first prompted him to

plunge his head beneath the bed-clothes, but overcoming the tendency by a determined effort of reason—for Jack Harris piqued himself on being a reasonable man—he rose up in bed and looked about him, waiting to see whether the sound would be renewed, or whether it was but a dream. He had hardly waited a score of seconds before he heard the same sound renewed, seeming to come from far away. It was intensely dark in the room, and he could not at first more than make out the faint outline of the palm-trees waving against the dark deep blue of the sky, and the distant glimmer of the far white buildings, while no sound came to him except the soft wash of the river among the beds of rushes. No wind seemed to stir the heavy drooping foliage. The languid air was painfully quiet. Once more the same strange sound seemed to come to him from far away up the river, where now he could dimly discern a gleaming light that shone like a star. The lazy motion of the boat was so pleasant and so easy that at first he was uncertain whether he was moving towards the light or the light towards him. But the soft suck and wash of the water as it rippled close to his head taught him at once that he was moving slowly and quietly towards it. The river seemed to widen as he went. The great palm-trees, which at first had seemed to close him in on all sides, now were farther off, and still he drifted, drifted. One hand dropped lazily over the side, and he felt the cool waters rushing through his fingers. Something struck against him, and remained in his grasp. He took it up and saw that it was a lotus flower. He pressed it vaguely to his lips, and as he did so a strange scent, such as he had never known before, seemed to float in upon his mind, and lulled him into sweet and dreamy fancies. But the boat drifted on slowly, slowly, and now he could perceive at either side of that strange stream great temples and buildings and the shadowy images of awful gods. The light still glowed ahead with undiminished brilliancy, growing larger and larger till it seemed to burn like some great sun, and its reflected light crept down along the rippling waters always just in front of his boat's prow. He was dimly conscious of a vague desire to reach this light, but ere he had time to wonder what it was the boat grated against the edges of a marble quay.

Jack, in obedience to an undefined impulse, at once rose and stepped on shore. Far ahead he saw the light, now grown to greater size, and it seemed to him that it blazed from the summit of some mighty building. In front of him he perceived a long avenue, on each side of which rose stately sphinxes and the effigies of departed monarchs. Up this avenue he made his way, his footfalls echoing behind him in the sullen stillness. He seemed

to have walked for a long time before he came to an open space, and there in front of him stood a fair palace with pillars and porticos and strange statues. Inside the place seemed alive with light. He went wondering up the marble steps. There were soldiers standing on guard. He knew them quite well by sight. He had often seen their fellows on fragmentary frescoes in the British Museum. But they betrayed no recognition of him, and seemed unconscious of his presence. He passed them by and entered the great building. Rooms upon rooms opened themselves out before him in a bewildering succession, but he seemed to know his way by instinct, for he trod with firm steps through the labyrinth of gorgeous chambers and along dark cool corridors, until at last he came into a great open hall, in the middle of which was raised a throne. On the throne a woman was sitting, clad in the garb of an Egyptian princess. The sacred asp was on her forehead, and the golden necklace round her neck was fashioned from the forms of the Egyptian gods. But the face was that of no Egyptian. It was purely Greek, and the golden hair which rippled from beneath an Egyptian diadem showed that its owner had no companionship with the swarthy children of the East. As Jack entered she rose, and descending from the throne advanced to meet him, holding out both her hands, and greeting him with the welcome, 'I have waited long for you,' which startled him by the liquid beauty of its tones. It was Grecian speech. Jack was a fair Greek scholar, and he had not time just then to be surprised at finding that the fair stranger's pronunciation was perfectly intelligible to him. He answered her—and he was surprised to find how readily his ideas ran into Greek—that he was sorry he had kept her waiting. He was about to say something about the boat being so late, but a faint sense of the incongruity of the remark prevented him from uttering it. Before he had time to say anything further the woman took him by the hand, and the warm pressure of her fingers caused his blood to beat quickly. She led him to the throne, and they sat down together. Jack looked with curiosity upon the face of his unknown hostess, and he was compelled to admit to himself that he had never seen anything so beautiful before off a Greek coin. The face was of the purest Hellenic type. Jack was familiar with it in scores of statues, but it never struck him as being so completely lovely before.

Jack felt vaguely embarrassed. He had never conversed with an Egyptian princess before, and he was not quite aware of the topics which would be likely to interest her. He had a slight acquaintance with Egyptian history, but he did not know how to

place her; and it would not do to begin a casual conversation about kings and events that had passed away hundreds of years before his fair hostess was born, or which, perhaps, had only come into being centuries after she had become a mummy. While he was debating within himself how he should begin the conversation, the princess, looking sadly into his eyes, said, 'Will you not set me free, my master?'

Jack was startled. As far as he could see the question of setting free lay with her rather than with him. Was he not in her palace, surrounded by her guards, completely in her power?

She seemed to see his bewilderment, for she went on, 'Do you not know me? And yet I became yours only last night. Thank you, oh, thank you, for setting me free from the hideous slavery into which I had fallen. But I will thank you, oh, how much more, if you will only accomplish the purpose which forbids me to fall asleep.'

'Do you mean to say,' said Jack, in vast perplexity, 'that I have had the honour of meeting you before?'

'You bought me only last evening,' she replied, 'and I am now your property. Strange fate for the beloved of an Egyptian king to pass from hand to hand like merchandise!'

'Do you mean to say,' said Jack, in a tone of great surprise, 'that you are the mummy I bought yesterday?'

'I am, indeed,' she answered, 'and so long as you choose you can keep me in slavery. But I implore you to fulfil my request to set me free, and perhaps you shall not repent it.'

'But who and what are you?' said Jack, his surprise getting the better of his politeness, and filled, too, with a faint desire to improve the occasion by informing his mind by conversation with a revived Egyptian.

She flung back her long arms behind her head wearily, and looked out from the open pillars to where the desert stretched far away, and the moonlight fell gleaming on the waters of the Nile. 'When I was young, and lived, men called me Rhodopis.'

'What,' said Jack eagerly, 'are you the famous Grecian who was loved by Psammetichus, and by the brother of Sappho; and was the pyramid built for you?'

'Hush!' she said, 'you shall hear all.'

He lay at her feet and looked up at her, and she sat with her hands listlessly folded, and her wide eyes gazing dimly into the east.

'I have long forgotten the Thracian meadows,' she said, 'and the mountains, and the ripple of the chilly streams between the fir-trees. Sometimes in after days there came across me the

memory of our childish sports, I and my brothers and sisters, among the glens and grasses, and the long evenings beside the fire when our father would tell us some tale of the war before Troy or of the wanderings of Odysseus, as he bent over his work, and in the leaping flames I seemed to see the figures of the gods and heroes of whom he spoke in his strange northern speech. Too soon dawned the day when men came trampling across the meadows and struck him down before his own door, and bore us children weeping away. Ah! it was hard to bear; but harder still the hour when I stood first in that Athenian slave market, offered to the man who would pay the most for me. They asked two thousand pieces of gold. It was a great price, but my beauty was rare indeed. Many a wise Athenian stopped and stared and swore I was well worth the sum; but few seemed ready to pay it, even for the pleasure of owning the fair-haired Thracian slave. At last there came by a young man who stopped and looked at me, and then asked my owner the price. He seemed unmoved when they told him of the two thousand pieces of gold. He only turned and called to one who was following him, and commanded him to go to his house and bring the sum. So the money was paid and I passed into the hands of this unknown Athenian youth, and a servant led me through the streets to his dwelling. The white pillars were hung with curtains of flowers, and behind a fair garden stretched away in rosy paths and myrtle alleys, where the marble figures of the Greek gods gleamed amongst the trees. When I asked his name who owned this place and me, they told me he was a merchant, the richest of all who came and went from the Piræus.

‘That evening I was summoned to my master’s presence. I found him with a roll of parchment in his hand, on which were written verses which he was reading slowly to himself. As I came in he raised his hand and beckoned me in front of him, and looked long at me with his grave, earnest eyes, and then he asked my name. I told him that men called me Rhodopis. Then he said again, “I have never seen anyone so beautiful, not even in sacred Mitylene, not even of all the women my sister loves—not Atthis, not Erotion, nor Anactoria.” Then he told me how, for my beauty’s sake, he had bought me, how I was his own to do as he pleased with, and he told me that he loved me well, and he bade me choose whether I would stay with him and love him, or rather take my freedom and go as I pleased into the world. Something in his eyes and the softness of his voice and the ripple of his hair moved me, and I knew not the worth of freedom, and so I chose to stay. Those were golden, those Athenian hours, and went by so

quickly, for he loved me as only a Greek can love, and we were glad as only Athenians can be glad. Never believe them if they tell you that an æon of the East is worth an hour of Athens. But the gods give not an enduring good fortune, and there came an evil time when the winds and waters between them shattered his stout ships and scattered his wealth upon the wasting deep; and across the sea from Lesbos came stinging, mocking verses of his sister Sappho, laughing at her brother bound by the arms of a rosy-cheeked slave; and so, at last, one sad autumn day when the wind was blowing the shaken leaves about the bases of the statues, he came to me from the garden and told me that he had lost all his wealth, and must betake himself to the sea again to regain it. But he told me, too, that I was free, and need be no man's slave again; and he said, too, perhaps we might meet again, and so he said me good-bye. But I went straightway down to the Piræus and wandered by the quays among the strange ships, and there I sold myself to an Egyptian for a goodly sum of money, and I sent the money back to the house of my lover, and so I sailed across the seas and came to Egypt to Naucratis, and there my Egyptian sold me again to a rich slave-holder in the town. Even now, in this still land, beside the silent Nile, I seem to feel the scented wind of Athens on my cheeks, and hear the murmur of Ilissus between the plane-trees and the choral voices of the quick-winged nightingales in the leafy hollows of white Colonus. But it was fated that I should come to the land of the Sacred River, and be beloved of an Egyptian king. I said farewell to Athens, and I looked upon a Grecian sky no more. I was famous in Egypt. I gave the land of the Nile a glory greater than it had yet known, and from the farthest ends of the earth men came to Egypt to look on the face of Rhodopis. I never saw my Athenian lover more, and I know not where he died or how. But for me, I won the love of Egypt's king, and bound him with my golden hair, and made him, master of many slaves, my slave. The great Egyptian loved me well, but he had not Greek beauty or Greek speech. I ruled over the lord of Egypt, and he never turned his thoughts one hour from me; he might have, perhaps—who knows?—for even my beauty was not immortal. But I died in the flower of my youth. I would never look into a mirror and behold a haggard, wrinkled face frowning back, and saying, "I once was Rhodopis"; and so, while still the glory of my beauty was in its summer, while still my eyes were bright and my hair was golden, I died, as I had meant to die, for I was weary of life, and I left my Egyptian disconsolate. He mourned for me bitterly, and built me a mighty tomb, and there I slept in mummied honour through

long centuries, I know not how long, till on a day men came whose speech I knew not, and broke my sepulchre open and bore me away. And so I have drifted from hand to hand, even as I have watched in my youth a dead leaf drift from wave to wave of the yellow waters. Now at last I am yours, and I want you, if you have pity in you, to do my bidding. I would be set free from my prison-house. I would be done with my memories and be free. Burn me, burn me, so that no shred of my mummied body remains unconsumed by fire, and then I shall be free and trouble no one more.'

The clear blue of the night had waned away. The saffron-coloured dawn was stealing along the sky, bringing out with strange blackness the tall palm-trees and the distant towers and temples. Above the full Nile the ibises floated languidly, circling over the flooded fields.

She turned her sad eyes upon him. 'Will you do this?' she said.

Poor Jack felt his whole being throb with unfelt emotions. For a moment he forgot himself, and London, and the 'Smollett,' and the Duke of Magdiel's. 'Do not command me to part from you,' he said; 'let me stay here for ever by your side—at your feet, if you will—your slave so long as I may look on you and serve you.'

Rhodopis shook her head. 'Be content, my London lover,' she whispered. 'You have been my master for a night; you have looked on the fairest face the world ever saw. Remember it well, for never while you live will you look on such again. And now you can set me free. Be generous; promise——' and she reached out her hand.

Jack caught it and pressed it to his lips. It seemed icy cold. As he kissed it the stately palace faded away, and from afar the dark waters of the Nile came floating in upon them. He stood holding her hand a moment, while the waves floated about the feet of the throne, lapping with faint noise against its pedestal; and then she seemed to glide away from him, far away, and the Chelsea sparrows began to chirp noisily in the trees, and the morning sunlight came into the room.

This was the story Jack Harris told to his friends, and Jack's friends were greatly interested in the story. It was certainly, as Theocritus observed, a sacred duty which the beautiful Rhodopis had imposed upon him. He must, of course, burn his mummy. On this point Heliogabalus, Theocritus, and Boiardo were as one. The mummy must be reduced to ashes, and the ashes given to all the winds of the air.

‘But how is it to be burnt?’ said Jack doubtfully. ‘It isn’t so easy to burn a mummy in one’s drawing-room.’

Theocritus leaned back thoughtfully; a flash of inspiration stole across his face. ‘The back garden,’ he murmured dreamily, and the excellence of the idea was at once appreciated by the great æsthetic quadrilateral.

Somewhat to the surprise of Jack’s landlady, a bonfire was promptly extemporised in the arid little square of gravel, with a strip of stony earth around it which did service for a garden-bed. Theocritus hurried off to the nearest chemist’s, and returned with a little bundle of spices and rare scents, which he deftly arranged upon the extemporised pyre. Then the four friends with some difficulty brought the mummy downstairs and into the courtyard, and placed her on the funeral pile. In breathless silence Jack struck a match (he had held a hurried consultation as to the fitness of using a match to an Egyptian mummy, and had decided that it was permissible in the nineteenth century) and applied it to the heap. The four friends stood silently watching as the thin flame caught the first slender strips of wood, and then grew longer and brighter as it struggled with the thicker parts, and finally sent up tongues of fire all round the painted shell which held the embalmed epigram on existence. It was a fine bright afternoon, and a fresh wind was coming from the Thames, which stirred the flames of the pyre to fiercer efforts. Soon the spires of light united into a broad sheet, and thick volumes of smoke clouded the mummy and the stately pyre, and floated—somewhat uncomfortably, it must be admitted—above the heads of the four friends, bearing with it a strange perfume of the scents of the burnt wood and the burning of the dried flesh and bone and sinew. Jack murmured some lines from Mimnermus; Theocritus softly hummed Gluck’s ‘*Che faro senza Eurydice*’; Boiardo stared dreamily through the smoke, as if he were seeking to catch in its changing outlines some resemblance to the soul of the fair Rhodopis; and Heliogabalus preserved an Egyptian silence.

The mummy did not take long to burn. In less than half-an-hour there was a little pile of blackened ashes in the middle of a burnt space on the gravel, which was all that was left of Jack’s mummy.

Jack heaved a sigh, and his example was promptly followed by his three friends; after which all went to dine together at the Smollett Club, and talked of the beautiful and the ideal far into the night.

The story of course got about. Jack’s strange vision was the theme of conversation in many an artistic drawing-room and graceful

studio. When Professor Petrus, the renowned Egyptologist, was told of it by an enthusiastic woman who went in for all kinds of culture, he was greatly amused. He said he had been to the shop and seen the mummy ; that it was not a woman's mummy at all, but simply the remains of some quite unimportant temple officer of one of the latest and least interesting dynasties. But of course all Jack's friends said Professor Petrus was talking nonsense. As for Jack's landlady, she insisted on having a new load of gravel brought in to make her garden once more presentable.

JUSTIN HUNTLY MCCARTHY.

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‘When Doctors Differ——’

‘Do I sleep? do I dream?  
Do I wonder and doubt?  
Are things what they seem?  
Or is visions about?’—BRET HARTE.

DURING the autumn of last year I was staying at one of the health resorts which abound in Germany, and are so much frequented by English valetudinarians and American tourists. For reasons which will be obvious later, I am unable to specify its precise locality; let it suffice to call it Waldersdorf, and to say it nestles at the foot of one of the spurs of the Hartz Mountains, is surrounded by pine forests, possesses several hot springs, a large hotel, and about 6,000 inhabitants.

The gloomy Hartz Mountains overshadow it, and the caves and caverns in the hills afford employment to a large staff of guides, sturdy peasants in the neighbourhood, who with their weird legends and tales of the spectre of the Brocken and wild huntsman delight or terrify the tourists who explore them.

I am, or rather was—for I am suspended at present, and how to get out of the mess I have got into I am sure I don’t know—junior house physician in one of our London hospitals for nervous diseases, and having made mesmerism and electro-biology my special study, intended utilising my holiday, after recuperating at Waldersdorf, by returning home *viâ* Vienna and Paris to investigate the mysteries of mesmero-phrenology and hypnotism. The very recent discoveries and lately enormous development of knowledge concerning this last strange power of influencing the actions of one human being by another, even when not in contact, had created grave scandals in those cities and greatly excited my professional curiosity. And, being an adept in mesmerism, I ardently desired to investigate this kindred power. I had been a few days at the hotel and thoroughly recovered my ‘tone,’ which had become relaxed in murky London, in the bracing air and scented pinewoods round Waldersdorf, and, being naturally of a social disposition, began to examine my fellow-guests. They were of the usual motley lot, not exactly ‘Parthians and Medes and dwellers in Mesopotamia,’ but that general description would, in other words, apply equally to them. My eyes roamed casually round the breakfast tables until they rested on one man whose *tout ensemble* from foot to crown stamped him Yankee. The broad

square-toed boots, the wide expanse of frilled shirt-front, with a diamond brooch pinned in the centre, the long black coat, the black figured satin waistcoat cut low down with an enormous cable chain of Californian gold terminating in an octagon-shaped gold double eagle festooned across it, a small black tie, and tall shaggy hat, spelt Chicago or Missouri with every item, and it needed not the goatee of greyish hair and the high cheek bones to proclaim the clime he came from.

Catching my eye he nodded affably, and pushing back his chair he pulled out a huge cigar-case, which he tapped, and, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, strolled into the piazza.

Nothing loth I followed him, for I had never met a regular 'down east Yankee,' and wished to study him.

'I guess you air Dr. Sanders, of the St. Vitus' Hospital, London, England?' he said; 'I'm in the same line myself in America; here's my kyard.'

I bowed, and taking the card, I read the name 'Professor Philastus, O, Kenfuron, Mass., U.S.'

'I saw your name in the strangers' book,' he continued, 'and I'm a whale on nervous subjects; shake.'

I was pleased to meet him as a *confrère* from whom it occurred to me I might get fresh inspirations, and so, as a companion, I grasped his hand warmly.

'Let's licker; here, Kellner, a bottle of Beaujolais; grows on an iron soil,' he continued turning to me; 'rale good stuff for the nerves, lots of iron and phosphorus in it.'

As I am one of those who 'when in Rome' believe in doing 'as the Romans do,' I had no objection to drinking sound Burgundy early in the morning, and pledged him cordially. As if by tacit consent we eschewed 'shop,' and I found him a remarkably well read and informed man in every way. Gradually our talk drifted into the channel our mutual pursuits had marked out for us, and we were discussing the emotional characteristics of the nations of Europe.

'No, sirree,' he was saying, 'what the Armada was to Spain, what Gettysburg was to our rebels, so was Sedan to France; that battle marked their turning point in the decadence of France as a nation. God curses with superstition men who have no religion, as your Walter Scott says, and now they have repudiated their religion, they will be the first to become the victims of the new and strange and fearful, because true, sciences that are looming in the near future. I have just come from Paris.'

Here I interrupted him with 'Did you see or hear anything of hypnotism? such strange tales are told of the recent discoveries in Paris and Vienna concerning it. Mesmerism I understand, at

least so far as a science that is in its infancy can be understood, but I want to know the natures and differences of hypnotism and mesmerism? I intend on my way home going to Vienna and Paris to study them.’

‘Du tell,’ he drawled; ‘that’s curious how you Britishers poke about. I’ll tell you all I know. Mesmerism is, as you know, called after Dr. Mesmer, who practised in Vienna in 1778; now, mesmero-phrenology, as it is called now, is a compound term applied to the discovery by which the manipulation practised in mesmerism being directed to any phrenological development of the brain, the particular faculty, sentiment, or propensity desired is called into exercise.

‘Hypnotism, from the Greek *ὑπνος*, sleep, terminal *-ισμος*, is a term for a morbid state of sleep; but now applied to the morbid condition of the cerebellum produced by various methods, and of which electro-biology (from *ἤλεκτρον*, amber, by means of which electricity was first discovered, and *βίος*, life, or the influence of electricity on life), whether transmitted by inanimate matter, or, which is far more potent, by the brain power and will and animal magnetism of another human being, is one of the most potent factors. Hypnotism is a vast scientific advance, whether for good or evil, on mesmerism. In hypnotism you can influence the patient, or rather the recipient, even at a distance and unconsciously; with mesmerism you have to be in direct contact, or at arm’s-length, so to speak, with the patient; in hypnotism the influencing power is more lasting, more powerful, more subtle, and its laws are as yet utterly undefined and undiscovered. See your English Dr. R. E. Maynes’ “Expository” work.

‘They air mighty hysterical cities,’ he continued; ‘so if you hear anything further’ (and here he glanced furtively at me), ‘wall,’ he continued, leaning back pensively in his chair and vigorously puffing out a volume of smoke, ‘you can let me know.’

‘Thank you, Professor,’ I said; ‘“Auf Wiedersehen,” as these people say. I must leave you for a while now. I have a lot of home correspondence to finish which will take me to dinner-time.’

‘Is that so?’ said the Professor imperturbably; ‘I guess you had better take a walk.’

‘No!’ I said, ‘I have an article to finish for the *Lancet*.’

‘Let it wait,’ he said, and it seemed to me there appeared to be a tinge of authority in his tone, but the thought passed as rapidly as formed, and I turned to go. Hardly was my back turned than I seemed to feel an almost imperceptible thrill pass through me, which, to a man skilled in mesmerism and nervous symptoms like me, portended something out of the common.

'My tone is not recovered yet after London overwork,' I thought vexedly to myself as I turned quickly round and looked sharply at the Professor; for I should not have liked him to note with his experienced eye that my nervous system was out of order and overstrung, as he might attribute it to wrong causes instead of to overwork, but he was calmly contemplating the ruby tints in his glass of Beaujolais. Going to my room, I arranged my writing-desk and commenced my correspondence. It was no use, I was not in 'writing trim.' Glancing up impatiently my eyes fell on my gaiters and excursion boots. 'Perhaps a walk will do me good,' I muttered, and proceeded to don them. I felt better then, and though I could not write my *Lancet* article, I finished some of my letters and started for the post. In the hall of the hotel I met the Professor. His eye lit up with satisfaction on seeing my walking costume, which I attributed to his desire to have a companion, but his face lowered on seeing my bundle of finished letters, and muttering 'to-morrow' in answer to my cheery invitation to accompany me, he abruptly turned on his heel.

After posting my letters, I was surrounded by a swarm of guides, who, seeing my knickerbockers and climbing suit, clamoured to take me to one of the show places of the neighbourhood. Curiously enough, all desire for a walk even had left me, and I curtly dismissed them, and going a short way up the hill by the baths, I sat down on an ancient stone seat to enjoy the gloomy picturesqueness of the frowning Hartz Mountains. A heavy foot-fall near me made me look up, and I saw a sturdy mountaineer, Yacoob by name, whom I had several times hired, beaming down on me from his six-foot eminence—a broad and, I am afraid I must add, sycophantish grin irradiating his weather-beaten face.

'Guten Morgen, high and well-born sir,' he said in broken English, 'I would with you to speak; the Herr is noble, he is—ach, Himmel!—so generous, I would him a Geheimniss tell.'

Now, I knew enough German to know Geheimniss meant a secret, and as I was bored with my own thoughts, I said, 'All right, fire away.'

Coming mysteriously towards me on tiptoe and looking fearfully round as if the birds of the air might hear it and carry it away, he half whispered, 'I will the Herr tell.'

'Speak up, man,' I said sharply, 'there is no one to listen, and it is safe enough with me.'

Thus adjured, he began, and to cut a long story and his broken English short, the gist of it was this: He, Karl, and Hans, two other guides, on the twentieth of the preceding month, had been deer-hunting in the mountains and had tracked a herd, and after

a chase of some hours had succeeded in killing the leader, a fine buck. The chase had led them into a part of the hills hitherto unknown to them, and as night was approaching they decided on camping where they had killed their quarry. While he, Yacoob, was engaged in grallocking the deer, Karl and Hans went to cut brushwood for a fire. Hearing them hastily call him he ran up, and found them tugging at a large iron-bound box, which had evidently become exposed through a landslip from the mountain, and was resting on some boulders with one end in a small rivulet near their camp. On the three of them lifting it, for it was very heavy, the end that had been rotting in the water gave way, and a shower of gold and silver coins fell out. Hastily replacing all except a few, they fastened up the end of the antique chest, and began discussing how to remove the treasure. While so engaged they heard several Jödels and signal shots in the mountains near them. Hastily extinguishing their fire, they threw the deer into a ravine and hid the treasure chest.

‘Whatever did you do that for?’ I exclaimed.

‘Because the Government Jägers fire first and ask questions afterwards,’ he responded grimly.

‘O-oh,’ I said, as the fact dawned on me, ‘you were poaching.’ He did not understand the word ‘poaching,’ but he saw I understood what he meant, so he nodded comprehensively.

‘See, high and well-born Herr,’ he added, pulling out a handful of silver and two gold coins. ‘These are what we took.’

I examined them with interest. They were all of mediæval dates, of that period known in the history of Europe as ‘The Dark Ages,’ and far more rare and valuable to numismatologists than the coins of any other period in Europe. I understood enough of numismatics to know that they were worth far more than their intrinsic metal value.

‘Why have they all got holes in them?’ I asked.

‘Because we have given them to our betrothed as “Glücksgeld” (luck-pennies, as they call them in England) to wear round their necks when they go to the Kirche,’ and a flush of affectionate pride mantled on his honest cheek. ‘Now,’ he continued persuasively, ‘the Herr has our Geheimniss, our segret; will the Herr help us? and the Herr and we all shall make much money,’ lapsing into German as he went on. ‘We cannot go to fetch the treasure alone, and we are poor men and cannot spare two or three days from the tourists, and we should be suspected of poaching if we three went away to get it. Will the Herr Doctor engage us to go on a botanising expedition? and then we can fill the tins for botanical specimens and our haversacks with the treasure, and bring it to

Waldersdorf and there hide it ; and then we could fill the tins with botanical specimens already provided,' continued the specious rascal, 'and then they would trust the Herr to take the treasure away and sell it to the best advantage, and remit to them (the precious trio) half the proceeds, and keep the rest.' This cool proposal fairly staggered me ; however, on reflection it seemed fair and feasible enough. I knew that at the chief centres of numismatology and the museums I could get far more than their metal value, and that most certainly if I refused they would melt them down for the metal value only, and these priceless antiquities be lost, as when in 1867 two wretched English country labourers had melted down the ancient Saxon Regalia, which had been buried after the battle of Hastings, and which they had found (getting about 600*l.* for the gold, and I am glad to add two years imprisonment), and—and—and—that I should net a tidy sum, and—what the German laws of treasure trove were I deemed it discreet not to enquire, and finally I closed with the offer. He received my assent with the stolid placidity of a German peasant.

'The Herr will please advance 100 Thalers.'

'The Herr will do nothing of the kind,' I answered indignantly. The flush of wounded pride rose to his brow.

'I am an honest German peasant,' he answered simply.

'Oh, well,' I thought, 'perhaps it is all right ; in any case I shall have three days' picnic in the mountains, but it will be lonely.' 'Well, Yacoob, look here,' I said, 'you shall have the advance, but I shall ask the American Herr Professor to be my companion. I cannot spare more than half the advance, and besides he can probably sell many at high prices to American museums.'

He demurred and protested that I alone was sufficient, but I had no intention of going a wildgoose chase alone, if it were one, and rather trusted to the Professor's Yankee sharpness to decide if there was anything in it. 'The Professor as well or not at all,' was my final decision, in which he sulkily acquiesced.

'Come to me at the hotel to-morrow at four o'clock,' were my parting words, 'and we will make arrangements to start next day.'

I then strolled leisurely back to the hotel, reaching it as the *table d'hôte* gong was sounding. In the piazza I saw the Professor.

'So you have gone for your walk after all?' he remarked.

'No,' said I.

'Eh ! how is that?' he asked brusquely.

'Oh, I started,' I said, 'but I have had an adventure I wish to discuss with you to-morrow morning after breakfast, so join me then in a bottle of Beaujolais.'

His face cleared and he responded heartily, and I did not see him further to speak to till we were seated at our little round marble-topped table with the wine between us next morning.

'Wall, now, what was your adventure?' he drawled, after we had clinked glasses.

'Well,' I said, 'it's about a hidden treasure we might have a share in.'

I never saw such a sudden transformation as there was in the man; he started forward.

'Du tell; a treasure?' he hissed; 'I've helped to find several after our war; good biz; where is it? what is it?' and his eyes glittered with cupidity. 'I can find it, sirree.'

Seeing he had made me jump, he continued more temperately, 'Tell me.'

Wondering at his excitement, I related to him the tale Yacoob had told me the day before.

'What is his temperament, Doctor?' was, in my opinion, the irrelevant question he next put.

'Sanguine,' I said shortly.

'Strong will power?'

'No; animal type of man rather,' I answered; 'but why?'

'Oh, nothing,' he replied thoughtfully, but not even a dim suspicion rose in my mind.

'Wall, I'll go snacks, of course; much obliged; I'll give you my share, the fifty thalers, this afternoon when we see him. Never mind my jumping,' he continued, 'I have found several buried Confederate treasures, and I felt kinder excited like.'

That was a perfectly satisfactory explanation, and when he suggested finishing the Beaujolois, and a walk, we amicably started arm in arm. After a short distance he pulled out the inevitable cigar-case, and handing me a cigar, chose one himself, and walked thoughtfully along with his hands in his pockets, puffing vigorously at his cigar.

We had left the town behind us, and were climbing the hill already mentioned. The Professor was loitering behind lighting a fresh cigar, while I strolled slowly on admiring the proportions of a buxom 'Frau,' who, clad in scarlet kirtle, snowy cap, and kilted blue stuff petticoat, with sturdy brown legs, was climbing the hill just before me, while a flaxen-haired chubby-cheeked baby peeped shyly at me from over her shoulder. Again I felt that strange nervous thrill I had experienced once or twice before in the preceding few days, and an intense desire seemed to possess me to make that child cry. This longing speedily overmastered me, and I commenced making the most diabolical faces at the unoffend-

ing infant. My success was sudden and complete; after one or two startled glances that injured fellow-creature set up a yell nearly as diabolical in ear-piercing intensity as the cause had been eye-hideous. The mother gave a frantic start, and turning round caught me in the very act.

*Potztausend!* what a row there was! in the most fluent Platt-Deutsch she made injurious reflections on my female ancestors, and other remarks of I doubt not equally defamatory character, from the sting of which my ignorance of Low German (in both senses of the word) alone saved me, while the baby howled in unison. Now that the deed was done I was filled with remorse, and could only smile fatuously and bow abjectly, pointing to my epigastrium and ejaculate 'Wind!' which I knew to be the same word in German, meaning I had been taken by a sudden internal spasm. This, and swallowing a cough-drop I had as witness to my assertion, and the present of a thaler which I hurriedly thrust in her hand, partially appeased her, and she marched grumblingly off, and when I turned round there was the Professor shaking his bones loose laughing at me.

'Wall, you air a queer critter; what on airth air you up to?'

I was too demoralised to reply, and walked on discontentedly kicking the stones in the road, and feeling out of sorts with myself and the world in general. This 'sulky state of feelin',' as Mr. Squeers calls it, lasted until we came to a rustic bridge under which a sluggish stream was flowing, while leaning over the railings an urchin was peacefully fishing. Again I felt the slight thrill through my nerve-centres, and again I felt possessed with the desire to inflict pain or suffering. I had a malacca cane in my hand, terminating in a stout iron ferrule. Drawing the stick swiftly through one hand, as if drawing it from a sheath, I was about to bring it down in a swinging cut on the unconscious boy's back. As soon, however, as my hand touched the iron, the metal seemed to complete a magnetic circuit through my system, and I could feel the electric current tingling through every fibre. At once the nerve centres seemed to recover their tone, and my sense of right and wrong and my will to recover their functions. Utterly ashamed and perplexed, I looked blankly at the boy and then at the Professor. He appeared to wear his usual look of professional calm, but suddenly it changed to a look of puzzled and annoyed enquiry, much like the expression I have seen on a billiard player's face as he follows with his eyes the effects of an unsuccessful shot at a critical period of the game. But I had no thought of connecting the Professor in any way with the morbid impulse I had experienced, and on turning to continue our journey up the hill

I found that the small boy was standing up and facing me, his thumb at the end of his little snub nose, and the fingers extended.

I quite recovered my good humour at this, and laughingly remarked, ‘Well, Professor, this makes me quits with the juvenile population of Waldersdorf,’ and shook my fist good-humouredly at him.

My experienced eye, however, at once noticed on looking more closely at him that it was not a piece of schoolboy’s folly, but that he was in a semi-cataleptic state, and I involuntarily glanced round the horizon to see if a thunderstorm was impending, and if the air was surcharged with electricity. All was bright and fair, so with a rapid electro-biological pass I released the boy from the state of tension he was in, and with a startled cry he picked up his fishing tackle and ran down the hill.

‘Strange,’ I muttered; ‘he must be subject to slight epileptic fits. I should almost think the demons of the Hartz Mountains Yacoob tells such queer legends about really had an evil existence. —Come on, Professor,’ I said, ‘let us step out briskly for the pass, and we shall be in time to see the “diligence” stop to change horses at the “Gasthaus” there, and perhaps we can have a glass of wine and a chat with the passengers.’

‘All right, pard,’ he responded, and we chatted pleasantly the rest of the way till we reached the ‘Gasthaus’ in the mountain pass. It was a long low building, the red tiles on the roof making a pretty contrast to the green jasmine with its yellow flowers that covered the walls and broad open porch. We were hardly seated with our ‘Bocks’ of lager beer in front of us when the lumbering old-fashioned diligence came jingling and jangling up. It was laden inside and out with a merry crew of travellers, and they poured into the inn with the guard and driver while fresh horses were being put to. The Professor and I, quietly seated in our corner, looked on with interest. Again I began to feel that subtle mysterious influence permeating my nervous system, growing more and more intense as my remarks grew fewer and more or less irrelevant, while the Professor occasionally glanced at me furtively with his keen grey eyes. At last the impulse overmastered me; my thoughts had run somewhat in this wise:

‘Here is that lumbering old diligence crowded with stalwart outside passengers. I am a better surgeon than any of the German doctors in Waldersdorf, and I should like to show them what a crack English surgeon can do, and this conceited Yankee too. The hill is very steep; what if I pull out the linch-pins from a couple of the wheels and upset the coach? We shall be the first on the spot of the accident. I have my surgeon’s case,

and shall get no end of credit for setting the broken legs and arms, and if some are killed, why it cannot be helped; they will only be martyrs to science.' These were some of the disjointed thoughts that seemed to pass involuntarily through my bemused brain, and finally so overpowered me that, starting up, I exclaimed, 'The room has become so close since all the people came in, I feel quite faint; I must have some fresh air.'

The Professor made no effort to accompany or detain me, and made no reply. Hurrying out of the porch, I looked cautiously round. The fresh horses, in all their glories of bells and ribbons, had been put to; the old yellow diligence, with the black eagle of Prussia on the panels, shone in the sun, and the heavy wheels were secured to the old-fashioned axles by large iron linch-pins. No one was in sight, so firmly grasping one of the iron linch-pins I endeavoured to obey the diabolical influence that had overshadowed me. As my hand grasped the iron, again I felt my nerve-centres wake my benumbed will to its original power, and I could feel the brain throbbing with a steady piston beat in unison as the reasoning faculties thrust aside the mental network that had appeared to entangle them, and I became again my true self. Recoiling with horror from the wheel, I stood still for a moment, pressing my hands on my burning forehead, amazedly asking myself what it could all mean, and deciding to start for England as soon as we had found and divided the treasure, and then to consult my friend Jones, our senior house physician. The travellers, and the Professor amongst them, now came out of the 'Gasthaus.' The Professor looked curiously at me and then in a casual way at the diligence. Again that puzzled annoyed look passed over his face.

'We must hurry back,' he said, 'if we are to see that fellow Yacoob.'

'Yes,' I said, recovering myself with a start, 'let us be off;' and indeed I was glad to leave the place.

The landscapes from the hill on going down were so pretty and varied that I soon forgot my hallucination in admiration of the ever-changing prospect.

'If our excitable Irish peasantry were only as sensible as these stolid industrious Germans, what a lot of worry and trouble they would save themselves and us under Lord Salisbury's beneficent rule!' I innocently remarked to the Professor. Whirroo! I had knocked the fat into the fire and no mistake; the Professor was a rampant Irish-American, and I verily believe a Fenian.

'That bloated, brutal Tory Government!' he yelled; 'never!

Now, under beneficent Home Rule and that grand old man Gladstone——'

I was not the honorary political secretary of a red-hot Conservative club for nothing, and I at once let off at him several speeches I had carefully prepared for the winter campaign, and we scolded and harangued each other, generally both at once, till we reached the hotel.

'Oh, wall,' said the Professor, 'we shall never convert each other; let's agree to differ. Come to my room in half-an-hour; I have some papers to write, and we will have a bottle of Beaujolais till Yacoob comes.'

I accepted the proffered flag of truce, and promised to come to his room in that time. On going to his suite of rooms in the hotel, I found he had a pleasant sitting-room with bedroom adjoining, the sitting-room plainly but comfortably furnished in the German style, and having as chief article a large writing-desk, on which were strewn the Professor's voluminous papers, together with treatises, pamphlets, and other works, which I could see were of many periods and languages, and from all parts of the world. He was busily engaged writing when I entered, and without speaking waved his pen for me to take a seat in a large arm-chair, the fellow to which was close to and nearly opposite me. By the time I had glanced round the room and taken in these details he had finished, and laying down his pen he took the arm-chair facing mine.

'We wasted our time discussing politics this afternoon,' he said abruptly; 'I would rather have talked about *materia medica*. Politics are for nations, science is for the world; politics are a jumble of more or less imperfect laws, science a harmony of perfect laws, could we but interpret them; we ought to have had more sense, Doctor; forget any heat of argument.'

I was quite disarmed, and frankly agreed with him.

'Now, Doctor,' he went on, 'that is all right. I want to talk to you about this treasure before the guide comes,' and as he spoke he fixed his steely gray eyes intently on me. Again I seemed to feel, not this time all through my nervous system, but in the brain-centres, in the pineal gland, that tiny substance in the seat of the brain which Descartes believed to be the locality of the soul, the same subtle influence pervading me; a cloudy mist seemed to rise before me, and the Professor's voice sounded hollow and far away as if heard in a diving bell or under water, or like the muffled sound of church bells as heard re-echoed from the sails of vessels hundreds of miles at sea.

'These "Bauers" have no use for this money,' he was monotonizing, it seemed to me, 'you and I can use it for the advancement of science ; to them it only means more Schnapps and tobacco, we can do good with it. Ours only, ours only,' he kept on pressing on my benumbed brain. 'Here,' he continued, 'is a paper I have drawn up dividing it equally between us ; when he comes you shall mesmerise him, and in his trance he will describe the exact spot, mentally step by step he shall take us there, so we shall know our way ; he shall bring it back for us, we will divide it and then rouse him from his trance, and he will not be a particle the wiser. Here, sign,' he ordered.

Like a man in a dream I acquiesced, and taking the pen I signed my name ; he looked keenly at the signature, and seemed satisfied.

'Now sign this,' he commanded, producing a second paper ; my will power had become so benumbed that I fumbled for the pen I had dropped, and while so doing and endeavouring to steady myself my hand fell heavily on an antique massive iron inkstand that was on the writing-desk. The metal again, as in the previous cases, struck home upon the personal magnetism we all possess in a degree major or minor, and which in my case I had so trained by my studies as to be under my control and knowledge. Go to an electric instrument and you find there are two poles, the positive and the negative. The two complete the current, but they must meet ; and so in the human being. You must meet your affinity or there is no sympathy. Kindred pursuits had temporarily made the Professor my affinity, but for a bad purpose. My right instincts he had rendered dormant, and perhaps would have succeeded in his designs, but just as electricity refuses to run along gold or wood or gutta percha, but chooses in its place the glittering steel, copper, silver, or sturdy honest iron, so the electric circuit completed by the iron flew to my nervous centres, sweeping away the mental meshes he had wound round my brain, and with a rush my reasoning powers cleared, my senses of right and justice returned, and I sprang to my feet. He did the same, and stood glaring at me. Hastily I snatched up the papers ; on the first I read in trembling characters my signature. Hurriedly reading the second, I found that it was a deed of gift making over to him my share.

'You rascally sorcerer,' I shouted, tearing them to pieces, 'I have found you out ; I would leave this place this minute, only that I know you would rob those unfortunate guides. I will be master,' and I made the most powerful passes in mesmerism I knew full at him, to make him tell me what wizard's art he knew.

He staggered back and shouted, 'I have mastered the arts of hypnotism, you shall do all I order; you are mine, body and soul, my slave.'

'Never,' I replied, as I set my teeth hard and braced all my nerves for the coming encounter of our will-powers. We were fairly matched. The Professor had more power of will, with the further advantage that he had permeated me the preceding days with his influence, and that he had full knowledge of the new discoveries in the mystic power of hypnotism. On the other hand, I was far superior in sturdy Anglo-Saxon physique, my nerve power was strengthened by indignation and the knowledge that right and justice were on my side, and I could pit mesmero-phrenology and its powers against all the arts of hypnotism. Not a word was spoken on either side, but we waved our hands as we made the passes at each other like two Frenchmen quarrelling over a game of dominoes. Our odylic spheres clashed, and while the Professor, so to speak, hurled at me the darts of hypnotism, I struck at him with the javelins of mesmero-phrenology.

After a terrible mental struggle on both sides my more stolid nature and robust physique (our scientific knowledge being equal) told upon the weaker frame, and, through it, the mental powers of the Professor.

Feebly waving his hand he called out, 'Let us call a draw; if we go on we shall be like the Djinn and fairy in the "Arabian Nights" and kill each other!' and sank exhausted into the arm-chair.

'Do you give in?' I fiercely demanded.

'Yes.'

In another moment he would have been the victor. I could not have mesmerised a mouse, and he had not a thimbleful of hypnotic power left. I needed not to be told I was a victor, no words are required in a struggle like ours, and with a sigh of relief I fell listlessly into an arm-chair.

'I shall remain till over to-morrow, Professor,' I said; 'we will still mesmerise the guide, because in his trance he can trace the treasure-place to us exactly at once, which in his ordinary state he would require hours, perhaps days, to find; but he and Karl and Hans shall have their stipulated share. You shall have your quarter share, as I shall not go back from my word, and I shall see theirs is properly disposed of.'

'I'm there,' he responded; 'shake on it.—It must be close upon the time for the guide to come,' remarked the Professor; 'I am too played out for him to-day; he must come to-morrow.'

'Yes,' I said, for two more utterly limp necromancers were never seated in two arm-chairs. A knock at the room door made

us both, in the then shattered state of our nerves, nearly jump out of our respective seats.

'Come in,' I called, and Yacoob's face appeared.

'Oh, Yacoob,' I said, 'you must come to-morrow; the Herr Professor has a headache, and I am not very well. By-the-way,' I continued, as a thought struck me, 'go down and bring up three "Schooners" (large tumblers) and half-a-dozen of Beaujolais wine.'

'Yah, mein Herr,' he said.

'And have it all charged in the bill to my account,' I added, as I felt the Professor hypnotise me with the last expiring bit of power he had left.

'Very well, Professor,' I thought grimly, 'we will see who is master. I will pay you out for that trick,' and I pumped the last remnant of mesmeric influence I had into him. On Yacoob's reappearance, I told him to open three bottles and fill the 'Schooners.'

'The learned Herr Professor will now'—here an alarmed snort from the Professor showed that he grasped the situation—'the Herr Professor will now proceed to give you,' I continued (in a sort of the-performing-monkey-will-now-climb-the-stick kind of voice) 'the sum agreed on, one hundred thalers.'

'By the screaming eagle, but I am dead-beat by the Britisher,' gasped the Professor, as he reluctantly pulled out a hundred thaler bank-note and handed it to the bowing and grinning Yacoob. 'Be here sharp to-morrow, same hour,' he snapped at Yacoob.

'Yah, yah, pungdual, I will here be;' and drinking his 'Schooner,' off he shuffled out of the room.

'I guess we will let each other severely alone till this time to-morrow,' snarled the Professor, turning to me.

'Very good, Professor, I do not think you will try any more tricks on this traveller,' I amicably replied, and handing him his tumbler, as he was thoroughly exhausted, I drained mine, and pouring out another drank that as well. I could feel the generous liquor bringing back the vital powers as it sent a genial warmth through the system. After drawing the cork from another bottle I placed it by him and left the scene of action, and by after dinner I had quite recovered from the effects of our encounter. Beyond hollow black circles round his eyes and a general lassitude he appeared all right when I met him in his room the next afternoon on the arrival of Yacoob. As we thoroughly understood one another there was an armed neutrality between us, much as exists between two rival doctors called into a wealthy patient simultaneously, and we wasted no time in preliminaries.

Two or three easy mesmeric passes placed Yacoob in one of the arm-chairs as peacefully asleep as a baby.

‘See if we can make him walk all right first,’ suggested the Professor, peering over him.

I made a pass at one leg; either I had miscalculated the strength or he was of a more guileless and easily influenced nature than I had supposed, for the leg obediently flew up, the foot encased in the heavy mountaineer’s boot catching the Professor on the shin, with the result that he promptly hopped frantically about the room on one leg, something like the stork on the roof outside, while he howled out, ‘You rascally Britisher, you did that on purpose!’

‘I did not,’ I indignantly exclaimed; and our lately patched up *entente cordiale* was in imminent danger; but seeing it really was an accident, he sulkily subsided and accepted my sincere apologies.

‘There is no doubt he can walk after that,’ said the Professor, ruefully rubbing his shin. ‘I shall want some shin-plasters from him after this.’ As shin-plaster is the American slang word for dollar notes, i.e. money, I saw he was not so much injured after all if he could pun like that, so I said, ‘Now, Professor, you question him while I take notes.’

‘Yacoob, you are now in the twentieth of last month.’

‘Yah,’ said he.

‘You found a treasure.’

‘Nicht verstehen.’

‘That’s a bit too premature, Professor,’ said I; ‘we had better take him through the day,’ which we carefully did, step by step, eliciting no further information except that he had got drunk and slog Karl ober den Kopf.

‘This will not do, Mr. Electro-Biologist,’ sneered the Professor.

‘Perhaps I have got hold of the wrong date,’ said I, perplexedly; ‘let us try another.’

We tried several, but all to no purpose. Beyond learning the names of the public-houses for some miles round and an inventory of the liquors consumed in them, in which occupation it appeared Yacoob, Hans, and Karl spent the greater portion of their time, we were no wiser than before, while the invariable reply as to the locality of the treasure was the interminable ‘nicht verstand.’ At last the Professor suggested I should take the day on which he confided the ‘segred’ to me, and see if we could get at it that way.

‘You remember three days ago?’ I said wrathfully, shaking my fist at his unconscious form.

'Yah.'

'What did you do after you left home?'

'I goes to de "Green Man" and has Schnapps.'

'He is at it again,' groaned the Professor; 'we shall only follow him to every "Swizzlehuis" round Waldersdorf.'

'He must come to me presently,' I said; 'he was sober when I saw him.'

'Wall, worry him along quick, Doctor,' said the Professor.

'Well, then?' I said.

'After dat I goes to de Bürgermeister's Frau and I gets de old Gelt.'

The Professor and I brightened up here amazingly; after all, our patience in 'tracking' the treasure was to be rewarded at last.

'Well, den I meets Hans and Karl and I says I have got de Gelt from de Frau of de Bürgermeister, and we goes and we has Schnapps at de "Blue Pig."'

'That is one of the evils of mesmerism,' I exclaimed, 'they must tell their tales step by step.'

'Well, what took place?'

'I says to Karl and Hans it is dime we played dot dreasure drick once more; dere is two peoples at de hotel will joost do.'

'What trick?' shouted the Professor and I simultaneously.

'Why, when a gelehrter Bube gomes to de hotel, one of us shows him dese coins and we tells him we has found a dreasure in de hills, and dot if he gifes one hundred thalers to look for it we shares it mit him; it is one goot schvindel,' he added complacently; 'de coins dey belongs to de Bürgermeister's Frau, and we gifes her ten thalers for de use of dem and we divides de rest. And I tells dat Spitzbube de English physician, and he tells dot oder baldheaded Bube de American Doctor, and he gifes me de one hoondred thalers; it ish good business.'

'Do you never give the hundred thalers back?' yelled the Professor.

'Not mooch,' responded Yacoob fervently.

We, the two sold sorcerers, so to speak, looked blankly in each other's faces for a minute. The absurdity of it all then struck me, and I roared with laughter. Not so the Professor, who turned fiercely on me.

'You dunderheaded British booby! where's my hundred thalers? You sham scientific ass, I'll——'

I thought this too much, to shove all the blame on to me, and as he happened to be in a direct line with Yacoob's other leg, with a rapid pass I elevated it, the foot catching the Professor quarely on that portion of the human anatomy that gave a name

to one of the most celebrated British Parliaments. Up flew the Professor at an angle of forty-five degrees, and, flop, down he came on the floor, while the leg and foot, their duty done, their aim and object accomplished, remained rigidly suspended in mid air.

With a few passes more I brought the leg down, woke up Yacoob, who began amazedly rubbing his eyes, and finally with a parting intensified pass I nailed the Professor temporarily to the floor.

‘Ta ta, Professor,’ I said, ‘I will leave you to explain matters to our interesting patient,’ and I fled. Not quite in time, however; as a parting shot the Professor must have levelled one long lean malignant forefinger at my retreating form, hypnotising me with all the concentrated powers of rage, vengeance, and baffled cupidity. I felt the hypnotic thrill pass through me, and hurried to my room to pack my valise to start for England. But the Professor’s vengeance had followed me. I got my wardrobe and other things safely packed; but when I came to place my writing desk in its usual receptacle at the top, the Professor’s will had caught me. Hastily sitting down I wrote to our senior house physician, my friend Jones, all I had ever heard, and it was quite enough, concerning that frisky matron his wife. Dashing the desk into the valise I quickly locked it, and carrying it down to the hall I called for and paid my hotel bill (it is a wonder, under the circumstances, that I did; but there must have been a slight reaction from the Professor’s influence, probably caused by my grasping the steel key of the portmanteau) and hurried off, still under his malign influence, to post the letter. On my way to the post I passed an old blind beggar, who sat near the hotel seeking alms. There were two bright new Silbergröschén in his tray, and stooping down I stole them both. This noble deed performed, I posted the letter, and then hurried to the station. As I reached the station the train came in sight. Taking my ticket I entered a compartment with a deep sigh of relief, and after ten minutes’ interval it started. As the train sped swiftly away I looked out of the carriage window to take a parting and, as I firmly determined, final look at Waldersdorf. As I looked down the long *chaussée* leading to the hotel, I gave a gasp of horror.

There was a motley crowd tearing at full speed towards the station. In advance, leading them on, like a general on horseback leading his army, was the blind beggar mounted on Yacoob’s back, yelling for them to seize that ‘Schelm’ the English Doctor, who had stolen his two Silbergröschén. On his right hand brawny Mrs. Hans, the mother of the insulted babe of the day before, was

running along petticoat tucked up and mop in hand. On the other side the little boy was leading a light contingent, so to speak, of all the dirty little boys in Waldersdorf, while following them were Hans and Karl and all the loafers of the town. In the remoter distance I could see the Professor, looking like some gaunt carrion crow in his long shiny black coat, as he frantically flapped his arms like lean wings, hypnotising the whole crowd to inflict whatever might be the German equivalent of Lynch law on my learned person.

Fortunately he was just too late, and he could not hypnotise an inanimate body like the train, and the last that I heard of Waldersdorf, I fervently trust for ever, were, faintly borne on the breeze, the yells of the disappointed crowd, and the words 'You Schelm of an Englishman!' I did not feel safe or at rest until I had set foot once more on the shores of common-sense England; but I found my troubles by no means ended.

On arriving at my house I found a notice of an action for libel on behalf of that frisky matron, Mrs. Jones. Jones has received my explanation with howls of derision, the Hospital Committee have suspended me pending the action, and I am a sorrowful old sorcerer and mesmero-phrenologist.

I have never heard of the Professor since, and do not want to, and as for Paris and Vienna, and the occult science of hypnotism—well, they can keep it all as far as I am concerned.

Science is a wonderful thing.

SAUMAREZ DE HAVILLAND.

# BELGRAVIA.

HOLIDAY NUMBER, 1889.

## The Curse of Uasartas.

### I.

‘WHAT is keeping Mr. Blake?’ was the question uppermost in my mind as, after dinner, I stepped out on the verandah of the sitting-room I shared with him at the Hôtel des Pyramides, Grand Cairo. He had gone out in the morning to explore among some rocks and ruins about a couple of miles down the river, but he had told me he would come back in time for *table-d’hôte* dinner at seven; so that now as the clock struck nine and he had not yet put in an appearance, I began to feel a little uneasy. Perhaps he had met with some accident, or had fallen among a marauding band of Arabs, or had tramped by mistake on a crocodile lying sleeping by the river’s edge. The night was dark, for the new moon was a mere half-hooped line of silver, and, as far as I knew, Mr. Blake had not taken a lantern with him.

I had come to the end of my cigar and was revolving the question as to whether it would be any use my going in the direction of the ruins in case any mischance had befallen him, when I heard his voice, from within the window behind me, exclaim excitedly: ‘Montague, Montague, I have found——’

Then he stopped suddenly as he remembered there might be other listeners besides myself.

‘Any of those Arab devils about?’ he whispered.

‘No—no one,’ I replied, after taking a turn up and down the verandah to satisfy myself.

‘Come in and shut the window: it’s safer,’ he said; and he himself closed the door, first making sure there was no one in the passage outside to overhear his communication.

Then he came close to me, and, lowering his voice, said, ‘I have found a tomb!’

I was so much taken aback at the nature of the communication that I did not at first understand the full significance of the remark.

‘I have found a tomb—a royal tomb,’ he repeated; then he sank down on a chair as if there was no more to be said.

I became interested, for I knew that Mr. Blake’s dearest wish was to discover something belonging to the hidden past, something of the far-away glory of Egypt lost for goodness knows how many centuries.

Mr. Blake was an archæologist, but, unlike most ‘ologists,’ he was not taken up wholly and solely with his ‘fad,’ to the exclusion of every other interest in life. He was the most agreeable companion I had ever met, and a man whom to know was to love. He was a gentleman and a real good fellow in the true sense of the word. It had been my good fortune to fall in with him on board the P. and O. steamer ‘Egyptian’ on the voyage out to Alexandria, for which place we were both bound—I for pleasure or sight-seeing or enlarging my knowledge of men and things, and he *en route* for the interior, where he was to superintend some excavations. Why we became friends I know not, seeing that we had not many points in common. To begin with, Mr. Blake was a widower of fifty, with a daughter at a boarding-school in London. I was twenty years younger—gay, careless, without any particular object in life save that of making the best of it. Mr. Blake was learned in the lore of the ancients, whereas my accomplishments were distinctly modern. I could play the banjo fairly, sing a comic song and tie an evening tie at the first trial. Whether it is that on board ship people fraternise more than under any other conditions of life I cannot say; anyhow, before the ‘Egyptian’ was out of the English Channel, Mr. Blake and I had joined the hands of friendship.

To Mr. Blake Egypt was as familiar as the land of his birth, so when he offered to become my guide and philosopher until the time came for him to start on his expedition, I felt that the pleasure of my trip was assured. I agree with Tom Moore that the beauty of a place doesn’t depend so much on the brightness of its waters and the green of its verdure, as on the presence of friends—the beloved of one’s bosom.

Of course I went straight to work (for it *is* work, and hard work too), to ‘do’ the lions—the Pyramids and the Sphinx and Memphis and all that—and at the end of a week I had seen all that was to be seen—‘the least interesting part,’ as Mr. Blake remarked.

‘How?’ I asked, not quite understanding.

‘What about all the ancient splendour?’ he replied. ‘Where

is it? Not lost. Where is all the wealth of the Egyptian kings? It was not taken out of the country or we should have traced it. It is buried, and for all we know, we may be at this moment standing on a perfect mine of wealth.'

Involuntarily I glanced down as he spoke, but I saw nothing save yellow sand.

When I had 'done' the place, I began to take matters more easily. After all said and done, life is pretty much the same everywhere—we eat, we drink, we smoke and we sleep: only in hot climates variety is given to sleep by the gambols of the mosquitoes.

Mr. Blake's expedition was not to start for some weeks, owing to inundations, so he spent his time in pottering about among ruins in the neighbourhood of Cairo; spent it profitably too, since the result was the finding of a royal tomb.

When, after telling me of his great good fortune, he had recovered somewhat his composure and had swallowed some refreshment, for he had eaten nothing since morning, he proceeded to relate the manner of the discovery of the tomb. He had come upon it quite by chance, by what indeed might have proved an unhappy chance for him. In descending a wall of rock, he had slipped and fallen heavily to the ground beneath. All he was conscious of at the moment was a slight, clinking noise, as though one stone knocked against another. For some time he had lain senseless, stunned by the force of the fall; then, in the cool evening breeze, he recovered, and as he rose to his feet and tried to recall the circumstances of his accident, he remembered the slight, clinking noise, and marvelled that a fall in the sand should have been so heavy. The particular spot where he fell was a hollow, caused by the wind having blown away the sand, and, as he glanced down he caught a glimpse of a little bit of dark surface on which the sand lay sparsely. In an instant he was on his knees, and had laid bare a slab of stone about two feet square, in one corner of which was rudely cut a dragon-fly, the sign of an ancient royal house. Unable to move the stone unaided, he had deemed it wisest to hide it from view once more by covering it with sand, and had remained in the neighbourhood until dusk, lest the Arabs should come on his treasure.

'But how do you know it is a tomb?' I asked.

'What else could it be?' he answered.

I really didn't know, so I asked him what he meant to do about it.

'I am going to sit and watch it all day to-morrow, for fear

the sand should be blown off it again, and the Arabs should spy it. I will show you the spot, and when it is dusk you will bring some Englishmen, and we'll open the tomb. There is to be a *fête* to-morrow night at a village four or five miles off, to which all the Arabs will go, so we shall not be observed. Once these fellows get wind of a tomb they would murder us to get the amulets.'

It is needless to relate how, in the guise of artists, in order to divert attention and to account for our presence in one spot, we watched that hollow in the sand all through the heat of the day; or how, as the shadows of evening deepened and the tall palms grew dim and indistinct, and only here and there a black glimmer showed where the Nile pursued its course between fields of rice and maize, a little band of English workmen, bearing ropes and lanterns, crossed the black waters in a track-boat, and crossed back again ere two hours had passed, carrying in their midst a long and very heavy object—the stone sarcophagus found in the tomb.

The next day, in the presence of several gentlemen interested in antiquarian research, the sarcophagus was opened. It contained the embalmed body of a woman in perfect preservation. She was apparently in the prime of life, and her thick, dark hair, drawn down on either side and confined at the ends with gold bands engraved with dragon-flies, emblematical of her royal lineage, reached almost to her feet. Her heavy gold necklace, from which depended various precious stones, was similarly engraved, and on the forefinger of the left hand she wore a gold ring, on which was the name 'Vasartas,' wrought in strips of agate beaten into the metal. The same name appeared also cut in the stone inside the lid of the sarcophagus. The linen wrapped round the mummy, although almost brown, was still quite good. About the left ankle there was rolled a strip of parchment, confined by a gold torque, which, however, was not so tight but that the parchment might be unrolled. Not doubting but that by this parchment the identification, so to speak, of the mummy could be effected, Mr. Blake removed it carefully, but found, to his surprise, that the writing it contained was in a language totally unknown to him. A native professor, learned in Arabic and other Eastern tongues, was likewise unable to decipher it.

'It is in a peculiar dialect,' he said, 'and I doubt if any man can translate it save one.'

'And who is that one?' asked Mr. Blake.

'Ahmed Ben Anen the seer, but he lies nigh unto death at this moment.'

Mr. Blake showed this parchment to all the professors and

experts in the neighbourhood, but they all failed to understand the hieroglyphics. Unless Ahmed Ben Anen recovered, therefore, there was no chance.

Meantime, what was to be done with the mummy? It was an awkward kind of possession, and hotel-keepers objected to it as being liable to attract robbers. Besides, Mr. Blake daily expected to be sent on his expedition, so he determined to despatch Vasartas to the British Museum at once, and so get rid of his responsibility. As the period of my stay was at an end, I undertook to look after the lady on the homeward journey, though, truth to tell, I didn't half like the idea; but, as fate would have it, luckily from the mummy-escort point of view, unluckily from every other, two days before my departure I was stricken down with fever. Of course there was no knowing how long it might be until I should recover, or if ever I should recover at all, so it was decided that Vasartas should not wait for me but go by herself, protected in some measure by a heavy insurance.

Mr. Blake set himself to nurse me back to health and strength, and a more tender nurse never smoothed a sick man's pillow, or helped by his presence to lessen the tedium of weary hours. Fortunately, my illness was not serious, and I had turned the corner before Mr. Blake got his orders to proceed up country, and, when the day of his departure came, I was strong enough to accompany him a few miles on his way. In a little grove of palm-trees we parted, and our parting was none the less manly that there were tears in the eyes of one of us—for Mr. Blake had been like a father to me. This parting, too, meant more than a clasping of hands, and that sad, sad word 'farewell'; for, if behind us lay the shadows of peace and friendship, and the memory of happy days spent together, in the vista of the future lay what? We knew not any more than we knew what lay a thousand miles beyond in that yellow sand stretching away before us out of sight. As I turned my face again towards Cairo, I felt the sense of having lost something—lost it past all finding; and when I traversed once more the narrow streets of the town, I thought I had never been in so dreary a place. I resolved to leave for England by the next steamer.

## II.

On the eve of my departure, three days after I had taken leave of Mr. Blake, what was my astonishment when I received a letter from him, brought by a messenger who had ridden all night and

all day in order to reach me that evening. Still more was I surprised at the contents of that letter, which ran thus :

‘My dear Harry’ (he had taken to calling me Harry when I was ill), ‘you once told me that if ever you could serve me in any way you would do so gladly. Little did I think that the time was at hand when I should ask your service, not for myself alone, but for my child Llorá. For her sake, then, I pray of you to return to England at once (this may reach you in time for the next steamer), and bring back Vasartas. This favour I ask of you is a great one, but I ask it under a terrible necessity. Go and see my Llorá, and you will the more readily believe how fearful is the thought to me that she may be in danger, and alas! through me. At all costs bring back Vasartas, ere it may be too late, for we cannot know how Fate will reckon time, or whether we may live a day or a year. Bring back Vasartas, and if I am not’ (here a word was erased) ‘in Alexandria to meet you I will leave instructions for you, which I beg of you, in the name of a father’s love, to carry out. I have written to my bankers to place 5,000*l.* to your credit to defray expenses connected with the recovery of Vasartas.

‘To save Llorá’s life bring back Vasartas I implore you, and you will earn the heartfelt gratitude of your true friend,

‘JOHN BLAKE.

‘P.S.—Llorá is a boarder at Miss Russell’s, Devonshire House, Lower Norwood. Please see her and make sure that she is well.

‘J. B.’

I read this letter over and over again, and each time I read it I became but the more perplexed as to its meaning. With what earnestness it besought me to bring back Vasartas! Four times the request was repeated, and always the safety of Llorá was pleaded. In what way could the whereabouts of a mummy affect Llorá’s well-being, nay, her life? It was a hopeless enigma. Once it struck me that perhaps Mr. Blake was overcome by some strange hallucination.

At length I recollected that he had taken with him the mysterious strip of parchment, as Ahmed Ben Anen, who was said to be recovering, lived but a few miles off the track of his route. I inquired of the messenger who had brought me the letter if Mr. Blake had visited the seer, and found that such indeed was the case. This letter then must, I argued, be due to something Ahmed Ben Anen had told him. I made vain conjectures as to

what that 'something' might be. All that was clear to me was that for some reason or other Vasartas must be brought back.

A fortnight afterwards I was back in England, and a letter awaited me from Mr. Blake's bankers stating that 5,000*l.* had been placed to my credit. I rather wondered why he had deemed so large a sum necessary.

At once I made application to the authorities for the return of Mr. Blake's gift, much to their horror and astonishment. A mummy was even more precious then than it would be now, for Rameses II. and Seti, and several other gentlemen now on view in the British Museum, had not been discovered. Besides, Vasartas was quite attractive-looking in her own way, and mummies are generally hideous. Rameses and Seti certainly are.

The charms of Vasartas had not yet been displayed; so I argued that to give her up would not be depriving the British public of its possessions, whereat the authorities hemmed and hawed, and said they would consider the matter.

Meantime I had another mission—to see Mr. Blake's daughter, over whom hung, apparently, some mysterious doom. So I betook myself to Miss Russell's high-class establishment for young ladies, and expected to make acquaintance with the usual type of unfledged hobbledohoy with which one generally associates the idea of a school-girl. I was ushered into Miss Russell's own sitting-room, and I smiled at the idea of myself, a young fellow of thirty, coming to pay a sort of fatherly or brotherly visit to a girl at a boarding-school.

Miss Russell herself—a prim lady of some three-score summers, in a black silk dress and a little white shawl and a violet beribboned cap, between which and her face on each side were three grey curls kept in place by little combs—Miss Russell herself inspected me before she allowed me to see the object of my visit. Was I a relative of Miss Blake? No? An old acquaintance, perhaps? Had I any particular message to deliver, as she did not care for the young ladies of her select establishment to be upset by visitors? I mentally remarked that the equilibrium preserved by the said young ladies must be uncertain, as it was so easily upset, but I didn't dare to say so. That cap with the violet ribbons and those three curls on either side of the lady's face had produced something akin to awe in me.

She asked several other questions, and finally told me in so many words that she didn't believe I had come from Mr. Blake—that I was an impostor in fact—a wolf sneaking into her fold. Then I hit on a bold plan, and tried what a bit of real imposition

would do. It's astonishing how people mistake the real for the counterfeit and the counterfeit for the real—just to suit their inclinations.

‘By the way,’ I said, ‘will you be so very kind as to let me have a prospectus of this splendid establishment. My aunt, Lady Belgrave, has three daughters who——’

That was enough to have gained an audience with all the girls in the school, had I wished it. A change came over the spirit of Miss Russell; she became affable to me directly, and enlarged upon the advantages which would be reaped by my aunt's three daughters if under her charge. The aunt and daughters were fictitious, of course, but they gained my point. Llorá Blake was summoned. Llorá Blake! How shall I describe her? I cannot, and yet that first sight of her remains an imperishable image of beauty on the negative of my memory. She was *petite* but exquisitely graceful, and a certain *hauteur* about the carriage of her pretty head impressed one with the idea that she was tall. Her face was perfectly oval, with small but delicately chiselled features and finely pencilled brows, and her eyes—to what shall I compare them? I know not. Once I plucked a violet on which a drop of dew had fallen, because somehow it reminded me of Llorá's eyes; yet the dew on the violet was fathomable, and her eyes were deeper than the sea. Her red-gold hair gave the idea of sun's rays that were tangible. When my eyes first met hers she was pale, but the next instant a soft rosy hue had suffused all her face and throat. I have taken a good many words to tell what perhaps any moderately far-seeing individual could sum up, and rightly too, in three words—‘I loved her.’

There, the truth is out! and the knowledge of that truth came to me pretty quickly, as quickly as the soft pink rushed to Llorá's cheeks, and I do believe if Miss Russell had not remained in the room I should have imparted my knowledge to Llorá herself then and there. As it was, we talked commonplaces, Miss Russell doing the largest share, and not forgetting to remind me every moment that my aunt had three daughters.

When I returned to town I found a reply from the authorities of the British Museum stating that on no account could they return Vasartas to the giver; that now they had her they meant to keep her. I thought of Llorá, for whose sake I would have made an effort to transport St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey to Egypt had it been necessary, and I determined to see if money would be of any avail. What a fool I had been not to offer it at the very first! Of course Mr. Blake must have remembered that

in these days money will accomplish anything, especially in England, and that was why he had placed 5,000*l.* to my credit. I do believe that if anybody offered the British public enough for it, they'd sell the Throne itself, for all their professions of loyalty. I therefore offered Mr. Blake's 5,000*l.* for what he had given freely. They haggled over it, whereupon I tried the effect of another thousand, and the business was done. Vasartas was no longer a possession of the British public.

Of course I decided to start at once; but first I went to see Llorá once more, on the plea that she might wish to send a message to her father. I saw Miss Russell, but alas! not Llorá. She had caught a bad cold and was feverish. The doctor was not alarmed, though he could not yet say for certain if it was only a mere cold. My memory reverted to those words in the postscript of Mr. Blake's letter, 'Please see her and make sure that she is well.' Had Mr. Blake any reason for saying this? No, assuredly not. How could he know that his daughter would catch cold nearly a month after he wrote? It was a mere coincidence, and yet he had said plainly enough that Llorá's life was in danger because Vasartas was in England. The construction I had put upon this was, that perhaps some Arab, Ahmed Ben Anen himself in all probability, had vowed vengeance if the mummy was not returned to its rightful possessors. Llorá's cold could not have any connection with the matter. Nevertheless, I plied Miss Russell with my fictitious aunt and cousins, and extracted from her a promise to wire me tidings of Llorá to Gibraltar or Alexandria.

Next day I left England with Vasartas for Llorá's sake, though for Llorá's sake I would fain have remained in England.

At Gibraltar I was terribly disappointed to find no news awaiting me from Miss Russell, though I flattered myself into the belief that no news was good news. We all of us, even pessimists in spite of themselves, believe what pleases us most; without these self-deceptions, indeed, life would be unbearable. Pandora's box is the common inheritance of everybody. I told myself there was no need for anxiety on Llorá's account; besides, if the presence of Vasartas had really any baneful influence on her, that influence was now at an end. Then I fell to wondering what Mr. Blake meant to do with Vasartas now that I had brought her back to him.

When the mails were brought on board off Alexandria a telegram was handed to me. Hastily I tore it open and read the fatal words:

'No hope of Llorá.'

I sank down on a deck chair and all power of thought or action seemed to leave me. I was like a man in a dream. People with whom I had been on friendly terms during the voyage went to and fro and addressed me, but I heard not what they said. The hurry and bustle of getting into the boats passed by me unheeded. How long I might have remained thus, with senses dulled to everything save the reality of Llorá's danger, I cannot tell, had not a hand been laid on my shoulder, and a voice said:

'Mr. Montague.'

I looked up. The man who addressed me was a Mr. Frampton, who carried on business as a solicitor and general legal adviser to the English residents in Cairo and Alexandria.

'Mr. Montague,' he repeated, 'I had instructions to deliver this into your hands so soon as you landed, and as I was afraid I might miss you on the quay I came on board.'

'Mr. Blake is not here?' I queried; but I did not notice that silence was his only answer.

'Thank God!' I exclaimed, 'I shall not have to tell him yet.'

'Mr. Blake is—dead,' said Mr. Frampton quietly.

'Mr. Blake dead? Impossible! and Llorá dying!'

'He met his death in a sad way,' continued Mr. Frampton. 'On the march inland with the expedition the party stopped to shoot some elephants. Mr. Blake was a good shot; I've been out with him. But however it was, he fired at a great bull elephant from the open and missed, or at any rate the shot only grazed the beast's ear.

'He fired again and missed, and before he had time to get to shelter the infuriated animal was on him, and he was literally trampled to death. They buried him on the spot, poor fellow, and one of the party came back to Cairo with the sad news.'

The horror of the thing took from me all power of expression, and the lawyer went on:

'About three days after the expedition started, a messenger returned and brought me this package from Mr. Blake. I think the same messenger had a letter to you also. Mr. Blake sent instructions that I was to deliver this into your hand immediately on your return from England, in case, through delay or accident, he might not be in Alexandria to meet you himself. How little he thought when he wrote to me that death would prevent the meeting!'

I took the packet and opened it mechanically. First I came on a letter to myself in Blake's handwriting. Trembling, I tore it open and read:

‘My dear Harry,—As I may not have returned from the expedition when you arrive with Vasartas, I must tell you the terrible secret which has been revealed to me by Ahmed Ben Anen the seer. Had it concerned only myself it would be of small account, as all men must die, and I have lived into middle life, and I thank God my life has been a happy one, therefore it is not for me to murmur at what must be. But it concerns also my Llorá, whom by this time you have seen. She is beautiful, she is young—too young to die—and for her sake I implore you to carry out this trust if aught should occur to prevent my meeting you when you come with Vasartas. You will see in the translation of the parchment, which, with the original, I send you, that the curse on my children only lasts until Vasartas is laid once more in the tomb. This I implore you to do, first replacing the original parchment where I found it. Then shall the curse pass from Llorá, and I alone shall suffer for what I did, Heaven knows unwittingly.

‘If it should be that I may not see you or Llorá again, tell her that I thought of her always, but keep secret from her the story of Vasartas. In after years watch kindly over that young life which I ask you now to save. We may meet again, but I cannot tell, for life seems now a thing of the past to your true friend,  
‘JOHN BLAKE.’

Hastily I withdrew the paper enclosing the parchment, attached to which was the translation in Mr. Blake’s writing. At the top of the sheet on which it was written I read :

‘AHMED BEN ANEN’S TRANSLATION.’

Then came the terrible words—

‘Vasartas of ten kings of the Royal House of Namoth.

‘Cursed be the man that shall disturb the tomb of me Vasartas. To him shall death come with violence and his bones shall be scattered with the winds. Also his children shall be cut off from life until I, Vasartas, be laid to rest and no more seen.

‘I Vasartas of mighty kings have spoken.’

The curse had fallen on Blake. And Llorá? Was there yet time to save her, or was she by this cut off from life? The telegram stated that she was dying. While there is life there is hope, so I explained to Mr. Frampton the necessity for haste, and he undertook to assist in the re-burial of Vasartas.

It was night when we reached the site of the tomb underneath the wall of rock from which Blake had removed the sarcophagus in such triumph only a few weeks before. Unfortunately, a great pile of sand had collected where the hollow had been, and it took a dozen men about an hour to dig down to the stone slab which closed the opening to the subterranean cavern. Once more we removed it and let the sarcophagus down by means of ropes. Scarcely had we got it into position when one of our party called out:

‘Here’s a sand storm coming up. Quick! Get to the other side of this wall, or you’re all dead men!’

Helter-skelter we clambered out of the vault, not even waiting to replace the stone, and took refuge behind the old wall that had withstood the storms of thousands of years; and not a minute too soon were we, for the great blinding sand-cloud was on us. At one moment we thought that even with the protection of the wall we were done for, as over the top of it came a great avalanche of sand, burying some of us up to our waists. Then, as the air cleared, we saw the dark-moving mass in front of us rolling away out of sight, and we knew that the danger was past.

We helped each other to scramble out of the loose sand, and having shaken out our clothing as best we could, we went round to the other side of the wall. But there was no wall to be seen—for there was a great bank of sand right up to the top of it. The tomb of Vasartas was well hidden, and, as it was open when we fled round the wall, the sand must have completely filled the cavern.

The next day I started up country with the messenger who had brought the news of poor Blake’s death, as guide; for I wished to remove the body from its desert resting-place and have it buried in the English cemetery at Cairo. After a six days’ march we reached the sad spot, but there was no trace of the grave, although my guide told me they had raised a mound over it some six or eight feet in height, and marked it with a wooden cross. In a neighbouring village I learnt the cause of the strange disappearance. A terrific hurricane had swept over the place, and thus the curse of Vasartas was fulfilled to the letter.

When I returned to Cairo news of Llorà awaited me—good news too. She was recovering, and her recovery, strangely enough, dated from the night we laid Vasartas once more in her tomb.

. . . . .

When I returned to England I became a pretty constant visitor

at Miss Russell's high-class establishment for young ladies, and she countenanced my visits on account of my aunt and three cousins. At length, however, I was obliged to confess that those four personages were myths, and that instead of bringing pupils to her, I was going to rob her of one. She forgave the deception, for she was a woman ; besides, a marriage from her school was really a magnificent advertisement. The fame of the school spread amongst mothers, and she had twenty additional boarders the term after Llorra and I were married.

EVA M. HENRY.

## The Brahmin's Gift.

By T. W. SPEIGHT.

### CHAPTER I.

AT that time—to wit, at the starting point of this veracious chronicle—I was a bachelor of thirty-five, with a private income which averaged nine hundred pounds a year. I rented a pretty *maisonette*, just outside the old-fashioned and aristocratic town of Dereminster. My modest establishment consisted of two women servants, a man, and a boy. I kept a couple of horses and rode regularly to hounds during the season. I was also an adept at fly-fishing, and played the violin fairly well for an amateur. Finally, my name was Horace Sparkinson.

Let the reader note that I say my name *was* Horace Sparkinson. What it is now, and how it came to be what it is, it will be my object in these pages to elucidate.

A suite of rooms in London would have been far more to my liking than vegetating in a dead-alive hole like Dereminster, but I was impelled to settle there for the time being, after my long sojourn abroad, by two powerful reasons, either of which in itself would have sufficed to induce me to act as I had. Reason number one was that my bachelor uncle, Mr. Matthew Chidley, a retired Liverpool merchant, lived at Briarfield, on the outskirts of Dereminster. He was seventy-five years old and in failing health, and it was only fit and proper that he should have his sister's son at hand in case of anything happening to him; besides which, there was a horde of harpy cousins and half-cousins ready to swoop down upon him like a troop of vultures had I not been on the spot to keep them at arm's length. I cannot conscientiously say that I was a favourite with the old man, but neither, so far as I knew, was anyone else. However, I dined with him every Sunday, and that was something in my favour. "Nobody could truthfully say, Sparky, that you're ornamental," he would sometimes remark with a snigger, in that plain-speaking way of his which I took care never to resent, "and I don't

know that you're of much use in the world, unless it be to act as a watch-dog and keep off the others with your bark."

The one trouble left him in life seemed to be the making up of his mind as to whom, and in what proportions, he should bequeath his money. I had it in a whisper from Shipton, his lawyer, that he had made three different wills in the course of a year, and that even then he was meditating a fourth. I was surely justified in hoping that I, his sister's son, who suffered a hebdomadal martyrdom under the lash of his tongue, which spared nothing and nobody, was not forgotten in the documents in question.

My reason number two, for pitching my tent at Dereminster, was because I was madly in love with Ida Menteith, whose acquaintance I had made at Nice in the course of the preceding winter. Ida, who was of age, and possessed of three thousand a year in her own right, lived with her uncle, Mr. Ralph Timbrell, and his wife, at Fernside, a charming country-house, about two miles out of the town.

It would be disingenuous on my part to say that at the beginning of our acquaintance my pursuit of her was not influenced by a knowledge of her income (derived from authentic sources), but when I came to know her better, I learnt to love her for herself alone; indeed, I can safely aver that there was a time when if she had not been worth a shilling, I should almost have been prepared—I say almost—to ask her to become my wife.

She wrote verses—of a sort—and brimmed over with all kinds of romantic, high-flown notions, but *au fond* she had a vein of natural shrewdness which saved her, if at times only by a hair-breadth, from overpassing the thin line which, as often as not, is all that serves to divide common-sense from absurdity.

Ida liked me—or rather, she liked my company. I was clever, accomplished, well-read, and, as times go, a fairly good conversationalist. But, alas! I was very plain-looking; indeed, there were not wanting some, chiefly my rivals in Ida's good graces, who averred that I was absolutely ugly. Half-a-dozen times had I been on the verge of proposing, when the remembrance of my ill-favoured looks caused me, at the last moment, to shrink from the ordeal. I used to grind my teeth with impotent rage, while watching the good-looking, but empty-headed, popinjays who fluttered round her, and noting with what apparent pleasure she

used to accept their fatuous flatteries and fulsome compliments, although feeling sure in my heart that she laughed at and despised each and all of them.

At length there came a day when I took my courage in both hands, and told her what she could have hardly have failed to guess long before. Well, I was rejected, and that in a way which left no room for hope in the future. Some women's "No," is not intended to be taken as final ; in the heart of it, carefully wrapped up, like a sugar-plum in a cracker, lurks its exact opposite, but not so with Ida. "I like and respect you, Mr. Sparkinson, but nothing would induce me to become your wife," she said, and I knew she meant it. When I looked at my reflection in the glass I could not wonder at her decision. It was an impossibility for any woman to love such a semi-satyr as I.

It was about a week later that I came to grief in the hunting-field. I was in one of those moods when a man takes everything as it comes without regard to consequences. My horse failed to clear a leap which, knowing what he could and could not do, it was madness on my part to put him at. We fell together, he rolling a-top of me. I was carried home on an extemporised stretcher. The doctors examined me ; it was a case of injury to the spine ; there was no hope. One of the medicos gave me three days, the other opined that I might possibly linger a week ; in any case I was doomed. I was paralysed from the loins downwards, and suffered no pain, which was something to be thankful for. My mind had never been clearer ; I was perfectly calm and composed, and already felt myself looking at life and its interests from an altogether impersonal point of view, and as if I were a visitant from some other planet. One thought, and one only, had still a flavour of earthly bitterness. "Is Ida sorry for what has happened to me?" I asked myself again and again. "Will any tinge of regret mingle with her brief memory of me after I am gone?"

I now come to a phase of my experiences of which I have not hitherto made mention.

During my stay in India, some years before I settled at Dereminster, it fell to my lot to be the means of saving the life of a certain Brahmin, a man who lived in the odour of sanctity, and was popularly credited with being a depositary of divers of the strange secrets and mysteries, said to be handed down from

one generation to another, of the priests of the *culte* of which he was so eminent a professor, and guarded more jealously than life itself from the knowledge of the outside world. Be that as it may, my Brahmin, who proved anything but ungrateful for the service I had done him, taught me one secret, as to which I used often to think, afterwards, that it would have been better for me if I had been left in ignorance.

What he taught me was, how to dissociate my inner self—my *ego*—my spiritual essence (call it by whatever name you please) from that mortal coil, the body; to exist apart from it for a certain space, and to re-assume my fleshly tenement when it pleased me so to do. Of the mode by which this strange gift could be made available it is not my purpose here to speak; it is enough to say that, to a large extent, it depended on the recipient's capability for bringing to bear an amount of will-force which probably not one person in ten thousand is endowed with. As it happens, I possess the power in question; had I not, the Brahmin's secret would have availed nothing so far as I was concerned. Such as it was, it was a gift which I had rarely cared to avail myself of; there was a certain element of risk connected with it which it was impossible altogether to eliminate. For instance, if I had chanced to stay away from my earthly tabernacle for too long a time, I might on my return, have found it as dead in reality as it was to all seeming; the pulses of life, which beat with but faint insistence while spirit and body were dissevered, might have come to a standstill, leaving me without a home, and, being unsanctified by death, under compulsion to wander, it might be for long ages, in a No-man's Land, where twilight ever reigns, there to consort with other shades, as forlorn and hopeless as myself.

It was on the third evening after the doctors had given me up that an irresistible longing came over me to exercise once more, and for the last time, this mysterious gift. I was utterly sick of lying on my pallet with nothing to do but commune with my own thoughts, which, of a truth, were of the most sombre hue. I felt that I should like to look on Ida once more, though it were in spirit only, before death should have sealed my eyes for ever. "I feel very drowsy, Nurse," I said to one of the two watchers who stayed by me day and night; "I think that, perhaps, I can sleep a little. Please be careful that I'm not

disturbed till I awake of my own accord." Ten minutes later I had slipped out of my earthly husk, more easily than a snake sheds its skin, and was standing, a disembodied shade, on the threshold of my own house. It was a frosty evening and the stars glinted like points of cold flame. Two seconds later a slight exercise of will-power set me down in the drawing-room at Fernside.

Ida, as usual, had three or four young men fluttering around her. Never had her eyes looked more unclouded, never had her laugh rung out more musically and joyously, never had I seen her more apt at persiflage and repartee. Poor fool that I had been, to dream that she would waste more than a passing thought on such a disagreeable subject as a dying man! The cold, still surface of a lake, over which the shadow of a cloudlet has passed, without lingering, is not more unruffled than she was.

I turned away, and scarcely had I formulated the wish, before I found myself in my uncle's library—so called. The old man was seated at his writing-table with an open bag of money before him. With trembling fingers, he was counting the sovereigns into little piles, of twenty each, and arranging them in front of him. His puckered face would have made a fine study for a picture of mingled greed and cunning. It was the index of his soul. No need to linger there. A wish—and I was gone.

I was next at Millingham, a large manufacturing centre in the north of England, fully two hundred miles from Dereminster, where lived an old chum, whom I thought I should like to take a peep at for the last time. My friend Denis lay prone on the hearth-rug of his sitting-room, sleeping the stertorous sleep of one who had indulged, not wisely, but too well. Was that the hideous Lethe in which his bright intellect was about to extinguish itself! I turned away with a shudder of mingled pity and repulsion.

As I stood on the steps of my friend's lodgings, debating as to whither I should go next, I became aware of another disembodied shade, like myself, who issued from a house a few doors up the street, and, without becoming aware of my propinquity, a second later was gone. My curiosity was excited. Who, and what, was my fellow visitant to No-man's Land?

which, I may here remark, I had found to be by no means so devoid of visitors as, in my ignorance, I had at first deemed it to be. Quite a number of people besides myself, hailing from various points of the compass, were in possession of the same secret which the Brahmin had imparted to me, and availed themselves, in a greater or lesser degree, of its dangerous privileges. But, indeed, it could matter nothing to me who or what the stranger I had just seen might be, seeing that, in an hour at most, I must be back at home, and creep into my husk, there to await the inevitable end, which a few short hours would now bring to pass. Still, having a little time to spare, I might as well gratify my curiosity for the last time. Next instant I was standing in the room which the stranger had so recently quitted. It was the unpretentious domicile of one who was both a bachelor and a student; indeed, I may say at once that its occupant, Percival Daubeney, was a promising young surgeon, who had lately taken his degree, and was temporarily attached to the Millingham town hospital. The door was locked, and on a sofa lay stretched his body in the state of coma (so to speak) in which he had left it to await his return.

It was the body of one of the handsomest young men it had ever been my fortune to set eyes on. As I stood gazing at it I could not help reflecting what a different lot mine might have been had I but possessed one tithe of this young fellow's good looks. Following on that thought came another, or rather a suggestion, one of those subtle whispers—whether emanating from within or without who shall say?—which nine times out of ten are the first tentative suggestions to wrong-doing. “Why not grasp the chance which fate has put in your way,” ran the whisper, “and take possession of this body while its owner is away? To go back to your own body simply means that you will be dead and buried in a week from now.” And then a series of dazzling possibilities flashed across my mental retina, chief and foremost among which I discerned firstly, that by so doing I should secure for myself a fresh lease of life, and secondly, that henceforth, instead of posturing before the world as one of the ugliest of my kind, I should gladden its eyes with a face and form which might, without exaggeration, be likened to those of a modern Antinous. Was it in the power of mortal to resist such a temptation? It was certainly not in my power

to do so. With such a chance held out to me, hesitation would have been the acme of folly.

Five minutes later, the recumbent body on the sofa opened its eyes, yawned, sat up, shook and stretched itself, then rose and crossing the room, stared at itself in the chimney glass. It was the body of Percival Daubeney re-animated by the shade of Horace Sparkinson. Admirable conjunction! As I stared at my exceedingly handsome self, I felt an intoxication of spirit, a mental exhilaration, such as I had never experienced before. Involuntarily I likened myself to another Faust after the transformation scene. I had been incarnated anew, and the world was all before me where to choose.

But it would be as well to get away before Daubeney returned to claim his property—I might have said his *lost* property. Not that I had anything to dread from his return, or that he could interfere with me in any way, still—Then an unpleasant thought forced itself upon me. In ceasing to be Horace Sparkinson, I had cut off all my sources of income, without being able to appropriate in lieu of them any revenues which might pertain to Daubeney; besides which, a certain amount of ready money was an absolute necessity. It was with a little justifiable anxiety that I proceeded to investigate sundry receptacles in the room one after another. At length in one of the drawers of a davenport I found a pocket-book containing fifty pounds in notes. To have felt any scruple about taking the money would be preposterous in the extreme. To the real Daubeney, so long as he remained in his present dis-embodied state, bank notes were of no more use than so many withered leaves, while to the new Daubeney they were a matter of vital consequence.

Behind the door hung a fur-lined overcoat, and in the adjoining bedroom I found a silver-mounted dressing-case, both of which would prove admirable adjuncts to my new personality. When I had added to them Daubeney's hat and umbrella, and had ascertained the time by Daubeney's gold repeater, I was ready to take my departure. I had turned down the lamp, and opened the door when a waft of ice-cold air smote me in the face and a shiver ran through me from head to foot. I fell back a pace or two with a constriction of the heart (Daubeney's heart in point of fact), which seemed for the few moments it lasted as if it could be caused by nothing less than the hand of Death. But it

passed, and I was quickly myself again. I recognized at once what it was that had so startled me; it was Daubenys shade come back to resume its mortal tenement,

But the tenement was no longer vacant!

"I pity you, my good fellow, I do, honour bright," I said aloud; "but self-preservation is the first law of nature, and I had no option but to do as I have done. Take my advice, which is, that you follow my example. By diligent searching you will doubtless be able to find some other fellow's domicile left empty for the time being, as you left yours, which you will be able to appropriate and make your own. You have my sincere wishes that your quest may prove a fortunate one, Adieu, *cher monsieur*—I trust that you are too much the gentleman to bear me any malice."

I got out of the house without being observed. Hailing the first cab I came across, I was driven to the railway station and before daybreak next morning was in London.

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## CHAPTER II.

AFTER spending a couple of days in Town, where I laid in a stock of clothes, and other indispensables and had the beard and moustache of Mr. Percival Daubeny removed by the razor, thereby imparting quite a different character to his face, I went down to Dereminster, and took up my quarters at the "George and Dragon," the best hotel in the town, entering my name in the register as "Mr. Evan Onslow of London." Three days after my arrival I had the unique experience of being a looker-on at my own funeral—or rather at the funeral of Horace Sparkinson. That gentleman, who had been fatally injured in the hunting-field, had been found dead in bed, having passed quietly away in his sleep. On the same day, I read in the newspapers an account headed, "Mysterious disappearance of a surgeon at Millingham." He was spoken of as being a young man of exceptional promise in his profession, and no adequate motive seemed forthcoming which would serve to account for so strange a proceeding on his part. I felt sincerely sorry for him and if I could have benefited him in any way, I would gladly have done so.

My one burning desire now was 'to be revenged on Ida Menteith for her rejection of me, or rather of the Horace Sparkinson who was now supposed to be dead and buried ; but first of all it was requisite that Mr. Evan Onslow should obtain an introduction to her.

Among other frequenters of the billiard-room at the "George," was a callow youth of good family of the name of Ford, who, from a casual remark overheard by me, I found to be well acquainted with Miss Menteith, and that, in fact, she, together with her uncle and aunt, were frequent visitors at his mother's house. To this young man I attached myself. I put him up to several "wrinkles" at billiards, practising an hour with him in private every morning. I initiated him into the mysteries of *ecarté* and poker, I told him stories of life in London and Paris which caused him to open his guileless blue eyes very wide indeed, and, above all, I took care not to win his money, or whenever I did, I so arranged matters that he should not fail to win it back at our next meeting. The result was that in less than a month after making his acquaintance, Mr. Evan Onslow was honoured with an invitation to the dinner, to be followed by a ball, given by his mother in honour of his coming of age. There, as I had fully expected I should, I met Miss Menteith, accompanied by Mr. Timbrell and his wife. An introduction followed in due course, and I was fortunate enough to secure three dances with Ida. When all was over, and I handed her into her uncle's brougham, I did not fail to favour her with a tender pressure of the fingers and a flashing glance from *mes beaux yeux*. Her eyes met mine for a moment and then dropped before their ardour in what I felt to be no simulated confusion. After that I knew the rest would be plain sailing.

Not many days passed before I received an invitation to dine at Fernside. I took care to pay assiduous court to both uncle and aunt, and as most of their little likes and dislikes were known to me of old, I was able to play on them without the trouble of having to find them out beforehand. So taken were they with me that, after my second visit, I might have spent half my time at Fernside had I been so minded. Nor did I experience any more difficulty in dealing with Ida. All her idiosyncracies were patent to me and I could strike any chord at will, feeling sure what the response would be.

"I have never met anyone with such an intuitive knowledge of me as you seem to have," she said to me one day, with a little uneasy laugh. "You seem to know my fancies and foibles almost as well as I know them myself." One trait in especial I had not forgotten, which was her, by no means uncommon, weakness for good-looking men, and Evan Onslow was far and away the handsomest man who had ever paid court to her.

She was fast caught in the toils, she who had caught so many in her time and had had such scant mercy on her victims.

My intention had been to cause Ida to fall in love with me, and then to treat her as she had treated Horace Sparkinson, but as time went on and I was more and more in her company, I fell under the old enchantment, and all thought or desire for revenge faded out of my mind; I felt only that I loved her and that the one purpose of my life was to make her mine.

All this time I was living at the "George," passing as a gentleman of means and leisure. Once I had secured the *entrée* to society, nobody seemed to trouble themselves about my antecedents, or cared to question me as to which branch of the Onslows my people belonged to. I was young and handsome, and had the knack of making myself agreeable, and having slipped in among them, they were quite willing to take me at my own valuation.

But, however pleasant all this might be and was, it did not blind me to the fact that when I should propose to Ida, as I had fully made up my mind to do, it was imperative that I should be in a position to answer whatever questions might be put to me having reference to my means, connections, and standing in Society. As far as Ida herself was concerned, I had no fear. She had one of those romantically impulsive dispositions which lead some women to derive a supreme delight from knowing that the man they love owes everything to them. If only when they give him themselves, they can at the same time lift him from poverty to affluence, the joy of the generous creatures knows no bounds. But with Mr. Timbrell it would be altogether different. Simple-minded though he was in many ways, he was a man of business, and he would undoubtedly put questions to me which I might find it difficult to answer with a due regard to the facts of the case. Here was a dilemma out of which I was puzzled to find a way of escape. I was

burning to propose to Ida and yet I was afraid to take that *premier pas* which is said to cost so much, being exceedingly doubtful where it might land me. If only I could persuade Ida to agree to a secret marriage!

Another disagreeable circumstance was that, about this time, I began to fall short of money. Daubeney's fifty pounds had melted down to ten, and I knew not where to look for a replenishment of my purse. Horace Sparkinson being dead and buried, it was out of the question that he should claim his dividends or draw a cheque on his bankers. This was a contingency I had not foreseen when I so precipitately and eagerly took on myself the personality of the young surgeon. It was awkward, deucedly awkward. Never till now had I known the meaning of the term "hard up," and the experience was not an agreeable one. Something must be done and that without delay. It would be ridiculous and worse to be turned out of my hotel just as I was on the eve of proposing to a young lady worth three thousand a year. Even if Ida were to agree to a secret marriage, I had no longer the wherewithal to defray the expenses of such an escapade. It was a most preposterous predicament to find oneself in, and at the same time one of the most maddening. Of a truth something must be done. But what?

Then by degrees a certain notion, dimly apprehended at first, began to assume form and consistency in my mind, till at length it formulated itself as a concrete idea. If by any means I could contrive to relieve my uncle of a portion of his superfluous wealth, I should merely be claiming, after a fashion of my own, a modicum of that which would doubtless have come to me in due course, had I, as Horace Sparkinson, outlived the old curmudgeon. I was still as much my uncle's nephew as ever I had been, and why should the whole of his wealth go to endow some charity, or otherwise to enrich that harpy horde of cousins and half-cousins who were waiting, with ill-concealed impatience, till the breath should be out of his body? But the question was, how to bring my idea within the range of practicability. The necessity which it involved was by no means a pleasant one to contemplate; all my instincts took arms against it; I recoiled from the prospect with a shudder. And yet, on the other hand, was I to run the risk of losing the only woman I had ever loved and three thousand a year to boot, for lack of a few paltry

pounds? The thought was intolerable. There was nothing for it but to whistle my scruples down the wind and seize the occasion boldly by the hilt, regardless of what might follow.

Without troubling the reader with unnecessary details, it is enough to say that on a certain night, or morning rather, between two and three o'clock, I found myself in my uncle's dressing-room, built into the wall of which was the safe in which he kept his money and other valuables.

As soon as my uncle's peaceful snoring had assured me that he was asleep, I stole forward into his bedroom, in which a night-light was burning, and possessed myself of the key of the safe, which was always placed overnight on a small table within reach of his hand. On getting back to the dressing-room I opened the slide of my dark lantern and went down on one knee in front of the safe, thinking to open it without difficulty; but, much to my disgust, I found that the lock was covered by a brass flap which fastened with a catch, and a couple of minutes passed before I found out the trick of it and succeeded in laying bare the lock. After that the rest was easy.

The bolts yielded noiselessly to the key, after which the door opened almost of its own accord. My hand was in the act of grasping a bag of money when a slight noise caused me to turn my head. Framed by the doorway, and glaring at me with eyes like those of a wolf robbed of its cubs, stood my uncle's long, lean figure clothed in his night-shirt.

"Robber—double-distilled scoundrel—thief!" he shrieked in his quavering, high-pitched voice. "You shall not escape me." Speaking thus, he made a dash for the bell-rope, but I was too quick for him.

Next instant we had closed in a desperate struggle, his object being to rouse the house, and mine to hinder him from doing so. The old man was wiry and much stronger than I could have believed possible. One of his arms encircled my neck in a grip which half choked me, while he panted and snarled in my ear like some wild animal. To and fro we reeled, I forcing him, foot by foot, further from the bell-rope. The only light was that shed by my lantern, which I had placed on the floor close by the safe.

Then all at once my uncle's strength seemed unaccountably to desert him, it may have been from failure of the heart; in any

case, his legs gave way under him, and he sank to the floor, dragging me with him.

We were close to the fire-place, and in falling his head struck against a sharp point of one of the steel "dogs" inside the fender. When I had succeeded in loosening his grip of me and had risen to my feet, I saw that a thin stream of blood was trickling from under his head. I stooped and felt his pulse, and as it was still fluttering, I concluded that he had merely fainted and would presently come round. I must do what I had come to do, and get away before he recovered consciousness.

In the safe I found a bag of sovereigns, which I pocketed without scruple, but beyond that there was nothing save a heap of documents, which would have been valueless to me. Stay, though; in one corner there gleamed a ring—a splendid cat's-eye set with brilliants—which I had occasionally seen my uncle wear, but never without coveting it. I have a weakness for jewellery, and without more ado I thrust the ring into my waistcoat pocket. After a last look at my uncle, in whose limbs I noticed a tremor which I took to be an indication of returning consciousness, I rang a peal on the bell loud enough to rouse every sleeper in the house, then I hurried from the room by way of the French window, and dropping from the balcony to the ground, I stole through the shrubbery and thence into the out-lying fields. A couple of days later I quietly reappeared at the "George" with my bag and umbrella. I had previously given out, both to the hotel people and the inmates of Fernside, that I had been called away to London for a few days on a matter of special importance.

But before getting back to Dereminster I had read in the newspapers an account of the burglary at Briarfield, and was inexpressibly shocked to learn that my uncle had died without having ever recovered consciousness, and that the coroner's jury had brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown." To me such a verdict seemed utterly preposterous, knowing, as I did, that my uncle's death was purely the result of accident. I felt sorry for the old boy, although he had so often rasped me cruelly with his tongue in days gone by. The bag taken by me contained eighty pounds in gold and a few pounds in silver. It was a miserably inadequate haul to have run such a risk for, and to have resulted in consequences so

tragic ; but even so, it was the only portion of my uncle's wealth which would ever accrue to me.

Now that I was in funds again there was no reason why I should not seize the first opportunity which might present itself of proposing to Ida. Consequently it was not without a sense of disappointment that, on reaching Fernside, I found she had gone on a visit to some friends. Her uncle and aunt received me as cordially as ever, which went some way towards consoling me for her absence. A few days later something happened which, not only annoyed me greatly, but had far-reaching consequences such as it was impossible at the time to foresee. The smaller of my two portmanteaus was stolen by someone who had obtained access to my room during my absence from the hotel. Fortunately, there was no money in it, I having changed the greater part of my gold into notes which, for safety, I carried about my person. Due notice was given of the robbery to the police, and there, as far as I was concerned, I expected the matter would end. A week had passed, when one afternoon I was waited on by two police officers, one of whom, producing the cat's-eye ring which had been my uncle's, demanded to know whether it was not my property.

No sooner had he put the question than it flashed across me what had happened, and, in an instant, I was on my guard. Taking the ring in my fingers, I turned it over as if to examine it. "No," I said, "it is certainly not my property ; I wish it were. I never, to my knowledge, set eyes on it till this moment. But why do you ask such a question ?"

Without answering me, he pulled out of his pocket the canvas bag which had held my uncle's money, and had his initials stamped on it. "Perhaps you will say that you have never seen this before ?" he remarked drily. "That I certainly never have," was my reply, "and now, perhaps, you will explain why I am honoured with this visit ?"

His explanation, a part of which I could guess already, was to the effect that the ring had been offered at a pawnbroker's by the man who stole my portmanteau ; the pawnbroker, having recognised it, owing to the description of it which had been circulated, had detained the man and sent for the police. The man had at once confessed that the ring was in the stolen portmanteau and that the latter article was at the cloak-room of a certain rail-

way terminus, where he had lodged it immediately after his arrival in town, first taking the ring out of it, but leaving the rest of its contents intact. On the portmanteau being searched, the empty cash bag was found stowed away in one corner of it.

The question that now required to be solved was, whether the man who stole the portmanteau, or the man from whom it was stolen, was the author of the Briarfield tragedy.

That night was passed by me in one of the cells of the Derminster police station.

Next morning I was haled before the bench of magistrates and remanded ; in the result, a week later, I was committed to take my trial at the next county assizes, on the double charge of robbery and murder, the fellow who stole my portmanteau having been able to prove that he was in another part of the country on the night of the burglary. By the advice of the man-of-law whose services I had retained, I reserved my defence, although what line of defence that would avail anything it behoved me to adopt, was "hidden in the deep obscure." Supposing I were to confess everything exactly as it had happened, would any jury believe my statement? Granting, however, that they did believe it, although I might manage to save my neck, it would only be at the expense of a life-long term of penal servitude.

Here was a scurvy trick for Fate to play a man who, only a few days before, had been looking forward to wed a beautiful girl and three thousand a year into the bargain.

The assizes were not due for six weeks. By the end of a fortnight I felt as if the horrible monotony of prison-life was slowly but surely eating away my brain.

I had not ventured to exercise my gift of dissociating my spirit from my body since I had assumed the *rôle* of Evan Onslow. I was too well satisfied with my quarters, and too much afraid of having the tables turned on me after a similar fashion, to allow of my venturing on so serious a risk. Now, however that I was a prisoner, friendless and alone, with a charge hanging over me which, if it did not consign me to the gallows, would at least cut me off for ever from all that makes existence endurable, the case was altogether different. The temptation was strong upon me to escape, if only for an hour or two, from my death-in-life existence. One night I yielded to it. Even if anyone were to seize upon and take possession of the body of Evan Onslow

it would be a poor bargain for him, bearing in mind the fact that, at the same time, he would be under the compulsion to take the risk of whatever penalties the law might choose to enforce against the person in question.

I lay down on my pallet and willed the change, which came about in due course. Whither I went, and what I saw during my brief absence from my fleshly tenement, is not to the purpose of this narrative. I was back in my cell in little over an hour, but only to find that the tables had indeed been turned upon me while I was away. Instead of being stretched on his pallet, as I had left him, a faintly-breathing, and all but inanimate frame, I found Evan Onslow, or, to speak more accurately, Percival Daubeney, slowly pacing his cell with folded arms in sombre meditation. Daubeney, for he it was, who had probably been almost continuously on the watch for the opportunity I had at length afforded him, had not failed to take advantage of it. He had treated me after the same fashion in which I had treated him, and, when all was said and done, he had merely reclaimed his own property. I could not blame him, and yet I experienced a vindictive pleasure (for so is poor human nature constituted) from knowing that, in all likelihood, he would, in the course of a few weeks, either be hanged, or condemned to life-long imprisonment. But nothing of the sort happened to him. Percival Daubeney was a long-headed fellow and he made a bold stand for life and liberty. When his trial came on (of course under the name and personality of Evan Onslow) he was able to prove a complete *alibi*. How was it done? you will probably ask. The secret was carefully kept, but it was one which I, in my then impersonal condition, was able to fathom without much difficulty. Quite half-a-dozen witnesses came forward at the trial and deposed on oath that on the night of the robbery and supposed murder, Evan Onslow was in their company at a seaport two hundred miles away. They were altogether unaware that Daubeney had a twin-brother, who had landed from abroad only a few hours previously, and that it was with him they had played billiards, and had afterwards spent a pleasantly convivial evening.

The awkward question still remained:—if the prisoner at the bar were innocent, how did it come to pass that the dead man's ring and cash-bag were found in the portmanteau stolen from

the hotel? To this Daubeney pleaded through his counsel that there was no proof whatever connecting him with the articles in question, that he had never seen either of them till they were shown to him by the police, that the cash-bag must have been put into the portmanteau by the man who stole the latter, which theory would also account for his possession of the ring; and that, although the man might, as stated, have been fifty miles away on the night of the Briarfield incident, there was no proof that he had not received both the ring and the bag from the real author of the outrage in question.

The jury accepted the view thus propounded and Daubeney was acquitted. As to whether he went back to Millingham, and if so, in what way he accounted for his disappearance, and the fact of his having lived for several months in another town and under a fictitious name, I have never taken the trouble to inquire.

And now to return to myself and the strange predicament to which I was reduced, which was that of a homeless shade, wandering forlorn through the realms of space—a condition of things from which there was no escape until I should succeed in re-incarnating my disembodied *ego*. Of my long wanderings to and fro with that object ever in view, the recital would only weary you.

Whenever I succeeded in finding an empty tenement awaiting the return of its owner, it was always either that of a man decrepit with years, whose earthly pilgrimage had nearly run to its close, or else that of some Eastern fakeer, or mystic, whose habits and mode of life would have been utterly abhorrent to me even supposing me to have been acquainted with his language, and to have been able to play his *rôle* without detection as an impostor.

At length there came a day when an opportunity offered itself, of which, although it was far, very far, from being what I would have chosen, I did not hesitate to avail myself. Know then, O Reader, who may have followed my narrative thus far, that should you wish to make the further acquaintance of the whilom Horace Sparkinson, you will find him in the person of Ephraim Saggars, a middle-aged old 'clo' man, who lives a lonely life in a frowsy, evil-smelling garret within a bowshot of the Minories. Do you think it possible that you can more than faintly imagine

what my thoughts are as I sit of a night brooding over my handful of fire with the ghosts of the dead past crowding thickly around me?

N.B. Ephraim Saggars deals in all kinds of cast-off wearing apparel. Cash down and no questions asked.



### *He'll Ne'er Return.*

THE woman he loved lay on his breast,  
The moonbeams slumbered soft in her eyes.  
The night wind played with her raven hair,  
And bore on its wings her tender sighs.

The nightingale sang in the ilex grove,  
The stars shone bright in the heavens above,  
As he bent his head o'er the sweet flower-face,  
Whispering words of passionate love.

The woman who bore his proud name by right,  
Sat trusting and lone, in her distant bower,  
Nor dreamt that he held, close-clasped to his heart,  
Another's form in that midnight hour.

The grey bird will sing in the ilex grove,  
The stars will shine in the heavens so blue,  
But he'll ne'er return to that distant bower,  
To honour he's false, to love—he's true.

JOSEPHINE ERROL.

## An Insoluble Mystery.

BY ALICE O'HANLON,  
Author of "The Unforeseen," &c.

### CHAPTER I.

ALL the world—that is, the small world of my personal acquaintance—considers me a lucky fellow. And not without reason, seeing that I possess nearly everything that the world most values. I am young, good-looking, well-born, wealthy and intellectually gifted.

But, alas, "every heart knoweth its own bitterness!" An exceptional experience has, during the past five years, poisoned for me the well-spring of every joy, and turned the summer of my life into a "winter of discontent." Save to three persons I have never yet revealed the strange facts which, under the cover of an assumed name, I am now about to lay before the public; and if the society whose object it is to collate and verify evidence of the apparently supernatural, or any individual authority on psychical subjects, can explain, by generalizing them, the phenomena of which I have been the victim, or can offer any reasonable solution whatever of the mystery which has, so far, seemed to set me apart from my fellows, they, or he, will earn my unfathomable and life-long gratitude. In the hope—a very faint one—of evoking some light on the matter, I now proceed to a brief, unvarnished narrative of facts.

In the summer of '84 I returned from Oxford to the paternal roof, flushed with the victory of a Double First. My father, Sir Aurelius Blanchard-Poole, one of the richest baronets in England and the best of men, received me with tears of pride glistening in his eyes. My mother (I was their only child) scrutinised my face with no less anxiety than joy, for beneath the aforesaid flush of victory she instantly recognised the ravaging effects of the battle which had preceded it. As a matter of fact I was worn out with study, prostrated, as it soon became apparent, both mentally and physically.

A physician was called in, and, by his orders, I at once set off for a month's recruiting tour abroad. A month was the limit fixed for this holiday, because, at the end of that time, my mother was expecting a guest—one whom it would not only be my duty, but my delight, to be at home to welcome. This guest was a young lady from Boston, Mass., Madeline St. Claire by name, and my affianced bride. I had met the charming young American girl at Saratoga in the summer of the preceding year and with the swift, but not, in my case, indiscriminating passion of twenty-one, had fallen deeply in love with her. An inquiry into matters of birth, position and antecedents having proved entirely satisfactory on both sides, we had become engaged, with the mutual sanction of our parents, and Madeline, who had no mother of her own, was now coming, by the invitation of mine, to spend some four or five months at Elam Towers.

Switzerland had always been to me an Arcadia of delight. Already, for my age, I was a practised mountaineer, and some few months ago I had been proposed and elected a member of the Alpine Club. It was to Switzerland that I now repaired, but on the present occasion I eschewed the society of my former climbing companions, kept strictly by myself, and essayed none but the easiest passes. The doctor had said that I needed complete rest both of body and mind, and I felt that he was right.

A fortnight of my holiday had passed when, one brilliantly clear, sunny morning, I found myself seated on a lateral moraine to the right of the Rhone Glacier. I had walked down a zigzag road from the inn where I had been staying for several days, on the summit of the Furca Pass, and had then turned aside into a narrow footpath leading upwards by the side of the glacier, and had clambered, with some difficulty, to my present elevation. The view from where I sat was superb. Before me rose those grim giants of the Oberland, the Shreckhorn and the Finsteraarhorn, whilst a little further off extended the glorious Alpine Chain from Mont Leone to the Weisshorn. Below me lay one of the finest sights in Switzerland, that magnificent frozen cascade, the Glacier du Rhone, fifteen miles long, breaking everywhere into huge billows and yawning crevasses. With the exception of an eagle, soaring far above my head in the sweet, pure air, not a living creature was within sight, and leaning my

chin on my alpenstock, I sat drinking in the exquisite panorama, dreaming heavenly dreams the while of my love, feeling new health and vigour in every part of my frame—enjoying, in short one of those moments of unclouded hope and almost perfect bliss such as but rarely visit even the most highly favoured of mortals.

All at once I became aware that my solitude had been invaded. Where she had sprung from I could not imagine, but immediately below me, climbing slowly up the glacier, appeared a female figure clad in a scarlet frieze cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her head. At the end of a few yards—and almost exactly opposite to where I sat—she paused—paused, I perceived, on the edge of a wide crevasse, into the depths of which she bent over to gaze. Shocked to think of the terrible peril she was incurring in wandering thus alone, without a guide, on a glacier of so notoriously dangerous a character as this, yet afraid to call out lest I might frighten her into a false step, I rose to my feet and held up my hand with a warning gesture.

The movement evidently attracted her attention, for she at once looked up. As she did so the hood fell back from her head, the cloak became unfastened at her throat and slipped to the ground. Disclosed thus to my view, stood a slender, girlish form attired in a curiously old-fashioned gown of light blue silk with leg-of-mutton sleeves. (I knew the description of these sleeves from their close resemblance to those of the portrait of my paternal grandmother in our picture gallery at home.) Crowning the graceful young figure appeared a cloud of pale yellow hair, which gleamed and shimmered in the sunshine, and below that I caught a vision of large, dark-blue, pathetic eyes and the loveliest features I had ever seen. It was indeed little more than a vision, for whilst I still held up my warning hand, those lovely features set themselves with a stony rigidity of purpose, a low despairing cry was borne to my ears across the frozen billows and with a sudden spring forward the girl disappeared down the crevasse, the red cloak, in which one foot seemed to have caught, sliding after her.

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## CHAPTER II.

FOR several seconds I stood motionless—paralysed with horror. Then, with a loud cry for help, which I hoped might be heard at a *châlet* I had passed a little lower on the mountain side, I scrambled down the moraine, and made my way, clinging to ice-peaks and jumping over fissures, till I stood by the crevasse down which I had seen that suicidal plunge (I could not doubt but that the act had been intentional). About ten feet in width at its broadest point, the crevasse extended for nearly sixteen yards up and down the glacier, narrowing gradually at one end to less than a foot and at the other to only a few inches across. In frantic anxiety I scanned the opening so far as it would admit of a human body. But nothing was to be seen. The blue walls of jagged ice closed by degrees into impenetrable darkness, and from those awful depths below came no response to my wildly repeated shouts. Thrusting my alpenstock into the ice to mark the spot, I hastened, as fast as my trembling limbs would carry me, back to the *châlet* already referred to, overlooking the glacier a little lower down. Here I found a man, who proved to be a guide, asleep on a wooden settle—also a boy, whom I instantly despatched to summon further help from the *Furca Hotel*.

In spite, however, of the utmost urgency, it was nearly an hour before, with a sufficiency of men and ropes, I stood once more by the fatal crevasse. But our combined efforts were to prove useless. Four men—two at a time—were let down into the yawning gulf; then I, against the strongest remonstrance, insisted on descending myself. It was a terrible experience. With a rope round my waist, I was slowly lowered into the blue-green depths, till I slid between the narrowing walls and the cold ice seemed to close over my head, leaving me in darkness and with the noise as of a thousand mills ringing in my ears. Then, all at once, my feet were seized as by some living thing, and I was whirled round with dizzy rapidity, to find myself the next instant being drawn upwards to the light. As had been already reported to me, a large “*moulin*” existed at the bottom of this crevasse, a swirling pool of water gyrating

round and round in a rocky basin and carrying with it huge boulder-stones, by the force of which any object so fragile as a human body must inevitably be crushed and ground to pieces. If the poor girl had fallen into that "Glacier Mill"—and how could she have escaped it?—her fate was sealed. Nevertheless, for days I haunted the place, and despite the blank hopelessness of the case, bribed people again and again to descend. It was only indeed, when I found myself beginning to be looked upon as a madman, that I at length desisted from these futile efforts.

As a matter of course, my alarming report had spread, and the strictest inquiries had been made far and near, but only to result in the discovery that not a soul was missing from the neighbourhood, certainly no one answering to the description I had given of the beautiful young lady with the golden hair.

In the end, when these researches had been carried to Brieg on the one hand and to Göschenen on the other, I began— notwithstanding the vivid and protracted nature of my vision, and the fact that *sound* also had accompanied the sight—to believe that I must have been the subject of a mental delusion.

And so I might have thought still, but for subsequent events. . . .

A week or more had been consumed in this painful manner, and now but a few days remained for the completion of my tour. Determined to dismiss, so far as I possibly could, the whole mysterious and perplexing matter from my mind, I now travelled rapidly from place to place, and having got over an incredible amount of ground in so short a space of time, found myself once more at home, just twenty-four hours before my dear Madeline was expected to arrive there.

In the opinion of both parents my trip had not done me much good. My mother, however, when she learned how far the last few days' wanderings had extended, happily attributed my pale and jaded aspect to over-fatigue. Not for worlds would I have told that dear, but nervous and fussy little woman, what had occurred.

To my father, howbeit a man with a mind constitutionally practical and sceptical, and who had cast off all superstition, even all belief in the supernatural, I described minutely every detail of my singular experience. His judgment, very forcibly expressed, confirmed the conviction into which I had already

been driven, namely that (unlikely as it seemed that I should have been thus affected at that moment of renewed health and vigour) what I had seen was merely a subjective illusion, the trickery of an excited or fevered brain.

Still, impelled though I was to this conclusion, the impression of reality produced upon me had been so intense that, even in the society of the girl I loved, I could not altogether throw aside the effects. Again and again that haunting figure in the blue dress rose before me ; again and again I started and trembled at recollection of that fatal plunge. By-and-bye, in spite of my ardent devotion to my promised wife, I felt that I must have some mental distraction, some occupation other than perpetual love-making. Accordingly, when she had been some three weeks at Elam Towers, I suggested to Madeline that I should employ myself for at least a couple of hours daily in study.

To this my sweet, sensible darling at once assented. She would be glad, for her own part, she declared with a smile, not to have "an idle young fellow dawdling about her all the day long," for even the most affectionate lovers might, she thought, "see just a little too much of each other." It was Madeline herself indeed, who, the very next morning, after breakfast, hurried me off to my private library. This room—my summer nursery in childhood, my favourite haunt as I grew up—was situated in a square tower which flanked the house to the right, and from which (incorrectly enough, for it was the only tower we had) the building took its name. Here, in this room, I had worked pretty diligently through some part, at any rate, of each long vacation during my college career, and here I had collected an extensive and valuable library of books. The apartment was a large, bright and airy one, lighted on three sides by wide mullioned windows, through one or other of which the sun, whenever there was any, sent his cheerful rays. On the fourth side was the door, opening on to a stone staircase which wound up from the basement of the house, and had no other means of access than that leading from the hall below. As will be understood, therefore, there was a sense of solitude in my airy sanctum, specially favourable to study. It is not, however, to explain this fact only that I have been thus particular in my description, nor, in truth, was the object with which I now sought this seclusion one that it is quite usual to speak of simply as

"study." For a considerable time I had been nursing in secret the desire of writing a novel.

Already I had produced two or three short stories, which had been at once accepted by the editors of the first-class magazines to which I had sent them, and had been pronounced to shew much literary ability. Encouraged by this success my ambition had grown, and I now determined to set to work on this larger undertaking, but to say nothing about it until I should be in a fair way to judge whether or not it was likely to end in failure.

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### CHAPTER III.

SHUT up, then, in my tower chamber, I began my novel. At first, I confess, I had but a very hazy notion of what the plot was to be, and the opening chapter was written slowly and with difficulty. But, in this case, it was to prove literally "only the first step that cost." In a very short time my novel had become to me a true distraction indeed. In the interest of this work, I forgot all about my haunting vision. I even forgot, during the time that I was thus occupied, my Madeline and my love for her. The two hours which it had been arranged that I should spend in "study," grew, by degrees, to three, four, five and even six. Lost in my absorbing labour, I took no note of time. But could it be called labour? Hardly. At any rate, it was labour without effort. Over the planning and composing of those short stories to which I have referred, I had spent much time and trouble. I had written and re-written them several times over, and not a line of them but had cost me some thought.

Now, however, no thought seemed to be needed, at least, no conscious or painstaking deliberation. Ideas rose spontaneously in my mind. Scenes and situations were projected upon my mental vision, as though by some force outside myself, and with the most wonderful clearness and verisimilitude.

The characters, moreover, of my tale became to me vivid realities, moving and living before my eyes. And more especially was this the case with the principal character—my heroine. At first but a dim conception, this creation (as I supposed her) of my brain grew daily and hourly less ideal, more of an actual substantial existence. Her habits, her temper, her little idiosyn-

crasies, her character altogether impressed itself upon my understanding so powerfully, that it became impossible for me any longer to regard her as an imaginary being, "the baseless fabric of a vision." On the contrary, Clarice Castello, for so I had named her, had grown to be more real to me than my flesh and blood sweetheart, more intimately known to me, more . . . No, for the moment I will reserve that confession.

In less than two months my novel was nearly completed. There were only a few chapters to add, when suddenly I laid down my pen, determined for a time to write no more, feeling, indeed, that just at present I neither could nor *dare* write any more. For two reasons, the first a singular one, to which I shall revert by-and-bye, the second that Madeline St. Claire had nearly quarrelled with me over my absorption in "study," and had threatened to break off our engagement.

Of a warm, spirited, and deeply affectionate nature, the poor girl had, very naturally, felt wounded by my growing neglect and coolness—a coolness which, I regret to say, was by no means simulated. Still, infatuated though I might be, I had not entirely ceased to love her, and, to save my honour and peace of mind, I now set about trying to convince her that my sentiments remained unchanged, and that her accusation of "caring for my books more than for her" was wholly groundless. Until she should herself send me back there, I would never, I declared, enter my tower-den again. Meanwhile, though I did not mention this fact—that den no longer contained the object which had so long and powerfully engrossed me.

My MS., my beloved manuscript, was now in the hands of a publisher, to whom I had forced myself, with not unaccountable reluctance, to send it for criticism. This publisher, the leading member of a leading London firm, and a very wealthy man, was a personal acquaintance of my own. His son, in fact, had been one of my chief chums at Oxford, and I had very often been a guest at the father's house.

Pending receipt, then, of the opinion that I had requested from Mr. A. B., I devoted myself with renewed assiduity to my *fiancée*, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing that she had fully forgiven me. It was fortunate for me, however, that just as I had succeeded in making my peace with her, Madeline left us for a few weeks' visit to a cousin of hers, who had married a Scotch-

man with a large estate far north in the Highlands. Having accompanied her thither, and given a promise to her hosts that I would rejoin them, and spend a few days at their place later on, I returned home to find two letters awaiting me.

The first of these that I opened bore a foreign postmark and was a curious example of "English as She is Spoke." It was written by the landlord of the Furca Hotel, who, although he knew that I could speak and read his own language (German) perfectly well, had chosen to address me in mine. As the matter of this epistle was even more remarkable than the style, and as I wish to give as little personal colouring as possible to this narrative, I shall venture to transcribe it verbatim.

"VERY ESTEEMED SIR,—It is happed to us here a Thing of the most mysterious strange, which I haste me at once to let communicate You. A She-Domestic of our Hotel is, in this last Night, here arrived back from to visit her Father-house by the Lac Zug. At the Father-house lies a many-years-bedridden Grandfather which has two-and-eighty Years. Anna, the Spoken-of-Maid, think to amuse this Old with Tell-Story. Also, for this Reason, she relate of the Ghost-Spirit which You, very esteemed Sir, in the Fancy—as, till To-day, we always believed have—by the Glacier saw. Ah, strange! So soon as Fraulein Anna finished to describe of the red Cloak, and how he fell off and made naked the Gold Hair and the blue Silk Dress with the Gigot Sleeves, what did that Old? Sir, he rise himself to the Elbow, and outcry with a loudquick voice, 'Mein Gott! Mein Gott!'

"'What have you then, my Grandfather? What makes you hurt?' question Anna terrorfully.

"'Ach! it must the beautiful Lady self to have been!' followed forth the Old.

"To make short, very esteemed Sir, he continue to his daughterling the all-now-understated.

"By the time he was a Youthful of about 20 years, the old Grandfather dwelled in Andermatt, which his Birth-Village was and the of his Father. The Father itself was a Guide-Farmer, and the Youthful also. For in those long-since-gone-by days came no Travellers but very seldom in the Aroundings. Only one late-in-the-eveningtime, as it therein nearly grown dark was

and thereout Cold, Snow, and much Storm-Wind, came to the little Châlet of the Father-Guide three Persons which even then over the Mount St. Gothard had down-strided on the Foot. It was a Gentman, a Wife to the Gentman, and a Maid to the Wife, all bynearly freezed to the Bone.

“Also the House-Mother make speed directly to before-set them some Eatings and likewise warm Drinkings. All then into the bed step. The Youthful forsake his to the Maid, Father and Mother theirs to those others. Ah! the Lady! The Youthful, now the Old, swear to memory her as yesterday. Never in the life before did he see a Thing so All-beautiful. Also, see then’ *the Lady’s Hair was shining Yellow, the dress, fair blue Silk, with Gigot Sleeves, the mantle, scarlet-red, with a Hood for the Head.* Next comes the above-all mysterious-strange!

“Very esteemed Sir, when the Morning arrive that Lady is no more in the Châlet. The Husband declare he know nothing, the Maid-female declare she know nothing; no Person know anything, only the Lady had vanish like Smoke in the Air and never, never to be seen once more.” (From this point the letter, it will be observed, becomes decidedly elliptical, as though the writer had grown weary of his linguistic efforts, and was in haste to conclude.) “Seekings was forth-follow, here, there, allwhere. But how? No footstep. Snow still downfall. The House-Mother cross herself and think Angel, Devil, Witch, who knows? The Gentman weep and depart, the Maid also. But the Youthful, now the bed-ridden Old, memory that beautiful Jungfrau for so long years time. And as Anna finish to tell-story, he outcry once more, ‘It *must* the same to have been!’ Forget that he so old is, and the beautiful One, when alive, also In myself, honoured Sir, and outside me many others, we now quite sure feel that it is truly a Ghost-Spirit that you into the Crevasse saw to leap. The good God defend that to none others the frightening Thing visible. I have the honour to remain, very esteemed Sir,

“Your humble Servant,

“Y—— Y——.”

How did this letter affect me? Did I, too, now feel satisfied that I had seen a spirit, a visitant from the dark unknown beyond the grave? A few months back I should have repelled

this suggestion with scorn and ridicule. Embued by education with my father's scepticism, I had hitherto held somewhat materialistic views of the universe. If I had not absolutely denied the existence of the supernatural, I had, at all events, felt convinced that human knowledge was bounded by experience, that the laws of nature were uniform and stable, and that nothing beyond sense-cognition was open to us. Personally I had been content to live in the present and for the present, and to ignore both dogmatic theology and transcendental metaphysics.

Now, however, my ideas and convictions had, I must confess, been thrown into considerable disorder. Like a man who has felt the solid earth rock beneath him, I was filled with an uneasy sense of insecurity, a bewildering loss of hold on the former realities of life. It is true that, as I have already stated, I had struggled to persuade myself that my vivid realistic vision on the Rhone Glacier had been merely an ocular delusion, produced by a supranormal or abnormal affection of my own mental functions. But I had never *entirely* succeeded in this effort; for, although in the absorption of my literary work I had been able to put aside all recollection of the vision, it had continued, at intervals, to recur to me in unoccupied moments, and especially in the silent watches of the night, with such reflex force of presentment that I had again and again been tempted to question within myself whether, indeed, there might not be more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in my philosophy.

Quite recently, too, a further phenomenal experience (such as, formerly, I should have deemed it incredible that I could ever have been the subject of) had dealt a fresh shock to my faith in the uniformity and stability of nature as I had conceived it; and unable, as yet, to organize a new mental adjustment, I was suffering a sort of helpless perplexity, which the receipt of this letter helped to increase to a positive moral vertigo. Taken in conjunction with that which I have still to reveal, it seemed to me (at least in my first agitation) that the curiously close resemblance in person and dress between the old guide's lost lady and my apparition must be something more than a coincidence. Anyhow, indisposed as I had always believed myself to superstition, the fact must be owned that, after reading the letter, I was seized with an almost panic-like alarm, which, for

the time being, paralysed the action of reason and judgment. Determined to throw off, if possible, the incubus of formless dread that oppressed me, I ordered my horse late in the afternoon and took a twenty miles' ride into the country, returning home only a little before midnight, physically exhausted but mentally much soothed and refreshed.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

IT was not until after breakfast the next morning that I remembered the second letter which had been handed to me along with that from the landlord of the Furca Hotel, and which, after perusing the latter, I had thrust unread into my pocket, and without even a glance at the superscription.

Drawing it forth now, I recognised the handwriting of Mr. A. B., the publisher and friend to whom I had sent my MS.

A flush of excitement rose to my brow, but I made no haste to open the letter. On the contrary, I sat turning it over and over for some time, in singular disinclination at once to acquaint myself with its contents. It was not, however, as might naturally be presumed, the nervous fears and hopes of a young literary aspirant which caused this hesitation.

I was neither afraid of a blow to my ambition nor a wound to my vanity. The sentiments wherewith I regarded my novel were far removed from these. Still, were I to give in my own words the gist of Mr. A. B.'s letter, or to record (save as quotation) the strong and flattering terms in which it was couched, I should, no doubt, draw upon myself the accusation of both vanity and exaggeration. To avoid this unjust aspersion, and also because, as I said before, I am most anxious not to intrude my personality any more than can possibly be helped into my tale, I shall beg leave to copy this letter likewise.

Addressed to "R. Blanchard-Poole, Esquire," it ran as follows :—

"MY DEAR REGINALD :—I have just finished reading your MS., and I now sit before it lost in amazement. I always knew, of course, that you were a clever fellow, but by Jove ! this production has startled me. My dear boy, you will make a name

for yourself with a vengeance ! You have written *the Novel of the Century*. Henceforth even Thackeray, Dickens and George Eliot may be consigned to back seats, or shall we say lower shelves ? I am not joking ; I really mean what I say. Man alive ! where did you get your heroine ? Where did you meet her ? She is no character in a novel merely ; your Clarice is a living, walking creature. You *must* know her—for I do. And, mon Dieu ! how she impresses me. She is a wicked wretch ; I fear her. She is a lovely, fascinating, enchanting angel ; I adore her. Yes, sir, I am positively and truly in love with your heroine—enamoured of her, and carried away by excitement as to her fate. Finish the book quickly, Reginald, and let us get it into print. I will send on the MS. to-morrow morning by special messenger. As to terms, money I know is no object to you, but I don't mind offering you £1,000 down for the copyright, with more to follow should the success prove equal to my anticipations. Get it done. Shall we advertize it at once ? Send word by the messenger. "A. B."

My answer to this question was a very decided negative, and fortunately so, both for my friend's sake and my own, for, despite that enthusiastic criticism, my novel never has and never will see the light of publication.

But why ? We now draw towards the strangest part, though not even yet do we reach the culminating strangeness, of my strange story.

I have said that, as I wrote of her, my heroine, Clarice Castello, had grown more and more real to me—that I had, as it were, so assimilated my conception of her person and character, that I had learned to know her as well, or even better, than my most intimate friends. This was true ; and it was further true (and here is the confession which I held myself from making a few pages back) that a strange, passionate admiration for this ideal of my own fancy had taken possession of me, and with such a strength of infatuation as absolutely to over-ride the affection I bore to my living lady-love. Does this assertion appear incredible ? Is it less incredible then, that Mr. A. B., from merely reading the words in which I had painted her, should have been affected in the way he describes ? Incredible or not, I can only state the simple fact—a fact that was all the

more remarkable too, from the circumstance that, up to within a few weeks of sending my MS. to the publisher, I had never been able to call up for myself a perfectly clear picture of my heroine's face. That the features were very beautiful I knew and felt, and I had described them in glowing terms, but, somehow, a sort of mistiness—a more or less transparent veil—had always, to my annoyance, seemed to intervene between them and my mental vision.

One evening, however, finding myself dressed for dinner some three quarters of an hour before the time, I slipped up to my tower chamber, meaning to add a surreptitious page to my novel before the gong should sound. Having lighted the gas, for it was growing dusk, I drew forward my MS. But instead of beginning to write, I sat nibbling the end of my pen and striving to pierce the cobwebby mist which obscured from my eyes that idol of my (supposed) creation. . . . Had the wish for a clearer perception brought its own fulfilment? Suddenly looking up, I saw directly opposite me, on the other side of the table, and as though resting against the back of a chair which stood there, a female face—a face of the most delicate loveliness, yet informed with an underlying, but very unmistakable strength of character. A smile of somewhat cynical amusement parted the perfect mouth, disclosing a row of even, milk-white teeth; but the smile ended with the mouth, and was piteously contradicted by the expression of the large, dark-blue eyes, which, as they looked into my own, seemed full of a proud but passionate despair. Surrounding the face, like the aureole of a saint, appeared a halo of pale gold, whilst beneath it, obscuring the chair from my view, hung a sort of opaque bluish cloud. In an instant, whilst I still gazed at it, the face was gone. As a matter of course, I had not the slightest difficulty in recognizing the true nature of *this* appearance. It was a *deceptio visus*, a temporary hallucination caused by an internal stimulation of the nerve-centres of perception. Those features, lovely as a dream, had no objective basis outside my own consciousness. How, indeed, could I for one moment question this fact, or attribute external reality to a face without a body?

Nevertheless, though able thus to reason with myself, I was filled with a vague awe in presence of this unfamiliar and startling experience. My heart throbbed wildly against my side

and I felt myself trembling in every limb. It was only when I had left the room, hurried downstairs and out into the grounds, that my nervous excitement began to cool, and I was able to view the thing in what I thought was its true light.

About this illusion I did not speak even to my father. It appeared to me to be of a wholly distinct nature from that former one, my vivid realistic vision by the Rhone Glacier. For that I could not yet satisfactorily account; for this there seemed an easy physical and scientific explanation. As is well known, there are persons who can see or feel what they conceive vividly, and this mental representation, so intense as to become mental presentation, is a faculty of the mind especially apt to be met with among artists. Goethe and Balzac had both the power of making certain mental images sensible to the sight, whilst that eccentric genius, William Blake, used habitually to see his conceptions as actual images or visions. No doubt, by the intense direction of my mind to the idea, I could, I thought, again at any time call to view that phantom face shining out of its golden halo, the embodiment of my fairest fancy.

But though, more than once, I actually tried the experiment, I did not succeed for over a fortnight in again working up imagination to the state of vision. One morning, however, in broad daylight, and when I was making no effort to see it, that phantom face once more flashed upon my sight. This time it remained with me longer, and I saw it more distinctly. The features, with their vivid beauty, seemed more rounded and real and the golden halo had evolved itself now into a mass of tangled curls. Moreover, as I gazed, I was struck with a curious sense of familiarity in the face, an impression, I mean, that I had seen it somewhere else than in that former momentary glimpse. And I was right.

When the vision had vanished I made what, at the moment, seemed to me a really appalling discovery. It was the face, the very same face, that had looked at me across the frozen billows and ice-peaks of that Swiss glacier! How came that face to be haunting me here? How came I to have pictured it unconsciously as that of the heroine of my novel?

It was after this discovery that I gave up writing for a time and sent my MS. to my friend, and it was by reason of the same

discovery that I felt so much more perplexed and disturbed by that letter from the Furca inn than would otherwise have been the case.

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## CHAPTER V.

IF, however, the climax of my extraordinary experiences had now been reached, this narrative of them would never have been laid before the public. For I should still have been able to persuade myself that all that had happened, curious and exceptional as it appeared, was capable of a rational explanation. As regards the old guide's story of his lost lady and the identity of description (so far, indeed, as his observation at the time, or his memory at this distant date, could be trusted) between her dress and appearance and that of my Swiss apparition, this I felt obliged, on reflection, to set down as a coincidence, remarkable certainly, but one to which it would be easy to find many parallels. For the rest—that is, to account for the uniformity of those visual deceptions to which I had been subjected, and their correlation with my imaginative heroine—I had built up a theory which seemed to supply a fitting key to the mystery. It would be useless, however, to weary the reader with the pathological or physiological arguments on which I had based this theory, because, as a matter-of-fact, the whole thing was knocked on the head by the sequel of events. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the hypothesis I had thought out so far satisfied and relieved my mind that, a few days after receiving Mr. A.B.'s letter, I felt equal to the effort of resuming my writing.

Naturally, I was determined to finish my novel. Who would not have been, considering the terms in which so competent a judge had spoken of it? But I was equally determined that I would never attempt another. Indeed, to tell the truth, I knew very well that I never *could* write another like this. It was an inspiration to which I felt implicitly convinced it would be impossible again to attain.

Meanwhile, the novel must be finished, and as quickly as possible. I was anxious to get it off my hands before rejoining Madeline in Scotland. At the same time, I laid down a rule for myself that I would not work more than a certain number of hours a day, and I resolved further to keep my intense and

exuberant imagination so within bounds that it should conjure up no more visible spectres to bewilder and perturb my senses.

Well, I recommenced writing (I had, I may parenthetically remark, obtained my fiancée's permission to resume my "studies" during her absence), and I found my task as light as ever. For fully a week the effort of composition was no effort at all. Thoughts and conceptions crowded into my brain more quickly than I could register them; words in which to clothe my ideas flowed as by inspiration from my pen. But at the end of that week came a striking change. I had now brought my heroine into a situation common enough in real life, and sufficiently commonplace in fiction. I must be allowed to protest, however, that hitherto neither the characters represented in my drama, nor my treatment of the subject, savoured in the slightest degree of the commonplace. Far from it. The situation in question was this.

Married to an old man whom she had accepted for his wealth and position, my Clarice had, since her marriage, met her "fate," in the shape of a young and handsome lover, who, in return for his own much weaker affection, had contrived to inspire in her a deep and consuming passion. Endowed with an inflexible will that could brook no opposition to its purposes, selfish, and, perhaps, even a little cruel (for, despite her fairness of complexion, she had a strain of Spanish blood in her veins), it was borne into my mind that Clarice would get rid of her unloved and unloveable old husband in order to marry her young lover—that, in short, she would poison him with arsenic. But, somehow, I could not bear to put this on paper. My ideal love could not, should not, *must* not stain her soul with this great wickedness. She was no saint; I had never represented her as such. Original and capricious, she had frequently transgressed against the conventional code of society, but never yet had she broken a moral law. Moreover, a certain softness and sweetness of temper, and a delicious fascination of manner, had, up to this point, served to conceal the strength of her iron will, as with a garland of flowers.

No, it could not be; I would end the tale, I resolved, in some other way than in the hideous one thus projected into my mind.

I thought out a plan which I considered might do. But what had come over me? My pen lingered and stumbled, my ideas ceased to flow, my mind had become almost a blank. I could

not now write a single sentence without the most wearisome effort. And what poor, bald twaddle it was when produced ! Line after line, and sentence after sentence I erased, but only to replace them with something equally tame and trivial. My inspiration had utterly departed. No one would credit it that these last pages had been written by the same person as the foregoing ones.

Still I persevered until, one afternoon—shall I ever forget that afternoon?—an engagement had prevented me working in the morning, but I had gone up to my tower immediately after luncheon, determined to have a few hours' good work.

I sat down before my desk, but—not a single line could I write. I struggled to think, until the mental effort brought great drops of perspiration to my brow. At length I managed to frame a sentence, and, dipping my pen in the ink for the twentieth time, I began to put it down. What was the matter ? I had a sense now of positive physical hindrance. Someone, I felt, was standing behind my chair. Someone—yes, a hand reached down from over my shoulder and touched mine—a hand and arm in a blue sleeve ! I started up.

There before me—believe it or not as you choose—stood the same beautiful girl, wearing the same old-fashioned gown of blue silk—just as I had seen her across the Rhone glacier. Her hand had fallen by her side now, but an angry frown contracted her brow. Distinctly I heard her utter the two words, "You fool !" Then I swooned away.

It must have been hours before I recovered consciousness, for when I did so, the sun had sunk low in the heavens and a flood of golden light was streaming in at one of the large uncurtained windows. I was no longer at my desk, as I then found, but reclining in an easy chair at quite an opposite end of the room. How had I got there ? I could not tell—nor for some time could I recover recollection of what had occurred before my swoon.

At last it all came back to me ; and rising, in much perturbation, I approached my table. When I reached it I fell back with a cry of alarm, and very nearly fainted again. On the top of my MS. (I had just numbered and placed there a fresh sheet of foolscap) lay a page of handwriting.

It was not mine. My penmanship is masculine and bold. This was distinctly feminine, and in the old-fashioned, fine-

pointed and sloping style affected by our grandmothers. Could someone have been playing me a trick? I ran to the door and turned the handle. It was LOCKED INSIDE. Cold and sick with dismay, I leaned back against the wall. I could not recollect having turned the key to-day, but I knew that it was my invariable custom so to do. I had begun the habit in the first week after commencing my novel, because, on one occasion, my solitude had been unexpectedly invaded by my mother and Madeline. On the carpeted stone staircase it was difficult to hear footsteps approaching, so, to guard against a repetition of the surprise (for it will be remembered that I had resolved to let no one know of my novel until it was completed), I had taken to locking my door.

And it was locked now. Besides, I knew—yes, I knew from the very first sight of it—that that page of foolscap had been penned by no mortal man or woman. When I could bring myself to read what was written there, I found more than sufficient internal evidence to confirm this view. And I *did* read it before I left the room that same afternoon—for I am no coward. I read it with my limbs quaking and my heart throbbing like a sledge-hammer. Then I buried it, together with my MS., at the bottom of a large ottoman-box filled with disused fishing-tackle and other reminiscences of my boyhood's days, and crawled below. By the following morning I was in the delirium of a brain-fever, from the effects of which I did not entirely recover for nearly three months. . . .

Five years have passed since then; my father is dead; Elam Towers, as well as much other landed and funded property, has passed into my possession; Madeline has long been my wife—the dearest and best wife that ever lived; but *she* is not one of the three people who alone, so far, have known anything about my first and last novel, and the mysterious phenomena connected therewith.

Having finished this plain record of those phenomena, I shall now disinter that so long unseen but never forgotten page of handwriting and let it speak for itself in a fac-simile lithograph. That it by no means flatters me is a matter of small consequence.

“My biographer is a fool. I should like to use a stronger term. Does the absurd fellow really suppose that he has created *Me*?

Does he not know that every word he has written has been at my dictation? That it is my life, my history he has been recording? Does he flatter himself that the fire, the passion, the genius of these pages are *his*? Bah! I laugh at the notion. How flagrant is masculine egotism! How preposterous the self-delusions of masculine vanity! Yet he might have had the credit of it all—of the spontaneity and brilliancy of description, the fertility of idea, the marvellous felicity of expression which I have been able to project from my brain into his—had he not chosen to rebel against my inspiration. Simpleton! I am enraged against him; he has spoiled my story; I have lost my power over him; he refuses to tell the *Truth* as I dictate it. He will have falsehood, foolish, futile falsehood. Then I will finish the story myself. But no, I cannot, I cannot! It will be in my power to hold the pen for only ten minutes longer, and that at the cost of most agonising effort. I must tell the bare facts in the baldest, driest fashion.

“Reginald, you goose, I *did* poison that wretched old man, and I *did* marry Paul Danvers. I loved him—Ah! how I loved him! But he—he was not what I thought—he was not worthy of me. Instead of the hot, rich blood of a valourous man, there flowed in his veins the poor, watery ichor of a poltroon. On our wedding-tour, six weeks after we were married, in the *Hospice* on the St. Gothard, I told him what I had done, what I had risked for him. But, oh, good Heavens! instead of adoring me with ten times his former fervour, I saw—yes, I saw it plainly—a look of *horror* steal over his handsome face, an expression of *loathing* rise to his eyes! And the next day it was there still; it was stronger than ever.

“Ha, my lost love! My bitter disappointment! My anguish of pain! My breaking heart! My final despair! Reginald, I could have described it all through you, and to do so would have been a relief, but you would not—— Ah, my hand grows thin and transparent, I lose my temporary power of retaining substantial existence. You know the rest, you know how my mental struggles ended. I could not, could not live! You know *how I died*. And, silly boy, why do you love me? I have no power to return your love, no capacity for further passion. Good-bye, I leave you for ever.

“CLARICE CASTELLO.”

Here, then are my facts for the Psychical Research Society. Surely, if ever there was a clear case of supernatural visitation, it is this. Surely the evidence of that mysterious page, half comment, half letter, affords in itself "confirmation strong as Holy Writ." Yet, so sceptical is the age, that two out of my three confidants still insist on finding a natural explanation for all, including that mysterious page. One of the two clings to the suggestion of trickery, in regard to the latter phenomenon. He contends that my door could not have been locked on that memorable afternoon, that my protestation on the subject is not to be relied on, seeing that I was on the eve of brain-fever, as though, forsooth, the disturbance had been antecedent to, instead of occasioned by that shock.

My second confidant, Mr. A. B., on the other hand, is of opinion that I myself wrote that mysterious page in a condition of somnambulistic trance, and he has offered me double the sum first mentioned if I will let him publish my novel as it now stands, with that page for an ending. Nothing, however, that he can say shall induce me to consent to this proposition. But as regards another request which he has continually worried me with, I will prove more complaisant. He has asked me, times without number, to send the "feigned handwriting," as he calls it, to an expert for comparison with my own. Well, let the general public act as experts. Here is my autograph, name and address :

Sir REGINALD BLANCHARD-POOLE, Bart.,  
Elam Towers,  
Loamshire.

And if any person can detect the slightest resemblance between this handwriting and the other, he is at liberty to communicate the fact to me through the editor of this magazine.

In conclusion, I may state that the third individual who has all these years been cognisant of, and faithfully kept my secret, agrees with me that, taken all in all, the experience remains, if not an insoluble, at least an unsolved mystery.

## Dr. Kenrick's Great Secret.

By IZA DUFFUS HARDY.

Author of "A New Othello," "Love, Honour and Obey," &c.

"It's a lonely-looking place," said Harry Osmond to himself, letting his horse fall into a walk as he drew near the house in search of which he had ridden out. "A lonely kind of place for her! I suppose this *is* the house. It can't be any other," and he ran over in his mind the instructions he had received on leaving Orodelfia City—we should call it a village here, but a barn, a bar and a general "store" make up a city in that far West wherein Harry Osmond had spent the best years of his life.

"Go straight on ; leave Red Cross Cañon on your left ; keep right on till you come to Blue River Falls, then bear round to your right by the woods till you get out in the open valley, and there you'll see Kenrick's place right before you."

So this was "Kenrick's place," evidently—a small, bare barrack-like wooden house, suggesting a grotesque resemblance to a Noah's Ark with all the paint worn off, set down in the middle of a strip of arid plain, its scant green burnt yellowish under the sun's merciless glare, walled in by dark, unbroken masses of the great red-woods on one side, by a jagged range of hills on the other. The general aspect of the house, and its position, produced an impression of forlornness and desolation in Harry Osmond's mind. He recalled the comments which his informant had added to the instructions in regard to the road.

"He's a queer sort, is old man Kenrick! They say he nearly blowed up Saucel City with his dratted experiments. We wouldn't have him here in Orodelfi', so he's built himself a place a few miles out. He comes in and out pretty often. There's some folks in the city won't send for no one but the old doctor when they're sick, but the gen'l opinion is that he's a mighty queer lot."

And Osmond was aware that a certain mild curiosity, with which he, as a visitor to "old man Kenrick," felt himself being

regarded, was mingled with a spirit of doubt as to the welcome he would receive at his journey's end—that complacent sort of doubt which was evidently satisfactory to those who had probably not been warmly welcomed at Kenrick's. The reflection of this doubt unconsciously entered into his own mind as he pulled up his horse at the door and paused a moment before dismounting.

He saw no one at the windows; not even a dog barked, not a cow grazed near the house. While the horseman outside lingered, and looked, and thought what a lonely place it was for a girl, a girl gazing out of one of the windows, out of his sight at the other side of the house, was thinking much the same—not discontentedly; the cloud of discontent never marred the serene sweetness of Grace Kenrick's face, but with a faint stirring of vague longing that “was not akin to pain.”

The tender haze of coming sunset was stealing over the landscape. The ragged edge of the barren hill-tops had been outlined harshly clear an hour ago against the blue glare of the sky; the sombre ranks of the red-woods stood out dark and stern in the afternoon light; but the soft opalescent mist of roseate rays, strangely shot with shimmers of gold, that flowed from the flushing western heavens turned all things of earth to beauty.

Grace Kenrick was used to the loveliness as well as to the loneliness of the scene; yet she gave a little sigh as she looked upon it. Not often, but now and then—and more often as she left her childhood further behind—a dim shadowy sense of the solitude of her life lowered like a faint passing cloud over her bright spirits. In the dead stillness of the hour and place she heard the trample of the horse's hoofs, the sound of someone stopping at the door, knocking on it with his knuckles, as there was no other means of gaining admittance. Dr. Kenrick had never thought it worth while to put up bell or knocker.

Grace went to the door and opened it. A tall, broad-shouldered young man stood there; bearded, sunburnt, with good-humoured dark eyes that lit up with a light of pleasure as they fell upon her face.

He looked at her for a minute without speaking, as if waiting for her recognition.

“You don't know me, then?” he said. “And if it was in the

uttermost corner of the earth I'd have known you, Miss Grace, though you're changed somehow, yet still the same."

The girl did not find fault with his speech for its inconsistency.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a brilliant smile of surprise and pleasure. "How could I have forgotten you, even for a moment? But there is excuse for me—you are changed! I don't know how I know you!" she added laughingly.

"Does five years change a fellow as much as all that?" he rejoined, a little deprecatingly. She had held out one hand, but he had taken both, and was holding them close in the familiar clasp of old acknowledged friendship.

"Is it only five years?" she said.

"Hardly more. I shouldn't think it *was* five years, looking at you."

And indeed Grace Kenrick at twenty was scarcely altered from what she had been at fifteen. A slender girl, with soft brown hair and a delicate, pale complexion, with irregular, yet somehow attractive features—a gentle, serious, sometimes dreamy expression—her great beauty in the large soft grey eyes, with their limpid candour and almost child-like sweetness and innocence—she was, as a woman, just what she had been as a child, except for a trifle more maturity of form and feature, a shade of added thoughtfulness and gravity—a look almost too thoughtful for one still so young.

The years that had left her almost unchanged had developed Harry Osmond from a fair smooth-faced youth to a sun-bronzed, bearded man. He had filled out in figure, too, and was now a splendid young fellow, who looked handsome, strong, and manly, in his picturesque sombrero hat, his riding-coat and his jack-boots.

Of course they soon came to the questions:

"How did you come here?" and:

"How has it been with you all this time?"

How Mr. Osmond came there was soon told. Since he had said good-bye to the Kenricks and started on a prospecting tour from Saucel City some five years before, he had spent his time in the mining district of the Black Hills; he had done fairly well there, was now on a holiday trip, had left his claim for a time in his partner's care, was on his way to San Francisco, and

had made a *détour* chiefly for the purpose of visiting his old friends.

How things had been with Grace Kenrick all this time she also made short work in the telling. She was very well, and the Doctor, her father was very well, and she liked this place well enough, though it had seemed a little quiet at first after Saucel City. Father liked a quiet life for his experiments; he had a big laboratory at the back of the house; but on this subject she did not seem inclined to dilate. Osmond remembered that when he had left Saucel City, Dr. Kenrick, the leading doctor there, was enjoying a large and flourishing practice; he wondered how much truth there was in the gossip of Orodelfia, and whether the doctor's experiments made him indeed so undesirable a resident?

Presently Dr. Kenrick came in. He was a man of rather slightly-built, wiry figure, of average height; his face was old and wrinkled, the lower part hidden by a heavy, untrimmed, wild-looking beard. Hair and beard were so thickly streaked and patched with grey, fast turning to white, that scarce a vestige of their original colour was discernible; but the eyes were young still—large, clear and bright, full of latent fire, wide with waking dreams—they looked out from under the grizzled brows in strange and almost startling contrast to the haggard, parchment-coloured face.

Grace went up to him with a happy, tender smile, and took his hand as she said:

"It is Harry Osmond, father! Would you have known him?"

The Doctor did not seem to take much interest in the question whether Harry Osmond was altered past recognition or not. He greeted him kindly and hospitably enough, with a cordiality that, although it was no more than lukewarm, clearly owed its moderation simply and only to the fact that his mind was too pre-occupied for him to spare much thought for the visitor.

Grace soon slipped away, on household cares intent. They kept no help—help in that country being hard to get and harder still to keep—so that Grace Kenrick's part in life was very far from being the ornamental alone. She bustled blithely in and out, getting the supper ready. Osmond jumped up to help her, and insisted on carrying the tray for her. One of the fruit dishes

was broken, so Grace ran to the laboratory and came back with a cracked retort, into which she put the preserved peaches ; this seemed to both the young people an excellent joke, although the Doctor, as soon as he realised the nature of it, started up in a hurry to assure himself that it was only a damaged and useless retort on which they had laid irreverent hands. The two young people laughed and chattered as they went to and fro between kitchen and parlour ; the elder man looked on with a sort of mild awakening of interest in things around him.

"I don't often hear you laugh like that, my girl," he observed once, looking at her radiant face, his absent eyes softening with a tender light. "I suppose it is that you don't often have anybody to laugh with," he added musingly and a little sadly.

"You'd think I was going off my head if I went about alone, giggling to myself," replied Grace gaily.

She paused in passing behind her father's chair, and bent over him caressingly, her fair cheek resting against his grizzled hair, her hand softly leaning on his shoulder. Harry Osmond could not take his eyes off her. He thought he had never seen so lovely a picture of filial tenderness. Like many men who have led for years the rough life of the mines, far apart from the influence of woman, he was highly susceptible to that influence.

Indeed, it often happens that the rougher the life, the deeper the spring of sentiment, and the readier to leap up when once the stone that has sealed it in its source is moved. Harry Osmond had lived so long among men alone, not a woman or a child near, that now a fair young girl was to him something wonderful and sacred, to be set up in a shrine.

He remembered that this father and daughter had always been devoted to each other ; but he had never realised until this hour how pure and beautiful a thing that devotion was.

Harry Osmond became a frequent visitor at the Kenricks'. He brought a new gladness into Grace's quiet life, a new sunshine into her smile. The Doctor was pleased to see his girl bright and happy. Grace was the apple of her father's eye ; there was only one hope, one dream, that he held even dearer than his daughter. Yet somehow, until now that he saw the brightening effect of a little cheerful companionship—the healthy influence of another young, strong, vigorous personality upon

her—he had never recognised that her quiet, lonely life of daily household work, pleasureless, friendless, needed some relaxation and recreation. It suited *him* so well, it had never occurred to him to doubt that it was equally well fitted for her.

Young Osmond's visits did not inconvenience *him* nor interfere with *his* way of life at all. If he were busy in his laboratory, Grace did not disturb him for Harry Osmond's coming and going ; she made no stranger of this old familiar friend, who had been her childhood's companion. It was long since anyone had visited at the Kenricks' on such free and privileged terms, and the doctor, somewhat to his own surprise, presently began to find that young Osmond's society was rather welcome to him than otherwise.

The two men, in spite of the difference of years and habits and tastes, got on very well together. Osmond was sympathetic, perceptive, and possessed of no inconsiderable intelligence. Doctor Kenrick was a man of highly-cultivated mind and remarkable intellectual power. There was scarcely any subject on which the doctor's conversation was not well worth attention—when he could be sufficiently drawn into interest to talk at all. But often his mind seemed wandering from whatever might be the topic of discussion, running persistently on something else. He would sit at the table with his gaze wide and fixed, his thoughts evidently far away, yet the brooding look in his absent eyes was not of trouble : it was clear that those absorbing thoughts were not of melancholy nor regret.

Fresh scraps of the gossip of Orodelfia City came now and again to Osmond's ear.

"Guess old man Kenrick's got a big bee in his bonnet. Thinks he's going to make gold. Get's bombshells and blows them up. He'll blow himself up sky high some day. He's nearly had the roof off that place he calls his laboratory two or three times."

Osmond remembered some of the Doctor's theories, and certain allusions to the nature of his experiments, which had been dropped in the olden days. Little forgotten words and trifles floated up in his memory, and roused his curiosity in regard to Doctor Kenrick's present pursuits, although delicacy withheld him from making any observation to Grace, or inquiring of her concerning her father's occupations.

One day, however, the Doctor himself said to his daughter :

"Have you told young Osmond, Grace?"

"Told him what, father?"

"Our secret."

"No, father, I didn't know whether you would like him to know anything about it."

"He seems an intelligent young fellow," the doctor observed musingly, "and I should think he might be trusted. He is not one of the babbling sort, I fancy."

Grace placed her own interpretation on these remarks, and the next time Harry Osmond went through the usual form of duty inquiries about her father, she added to the usual answer, that he was busy in his laboratory, the observation:

"He is at a very interesting stage of his experiments just now," and Osmond was prompt to perceive by her manner, no longer restrained, as it had hitherto been, by a certain undefinable suggestion of reserve, that she was ready and willing to enter upon the subject of those mysterious "experiments."

"And *you* are interested in them too?" he observed tentatively.

"Yes—I wonder whether you would be? You have never gone in for chemistry at all, have you?"

"I've dabbled in it a little," replied Harry, who had indeed "dabbled a little" in most things. "And any experiments in which *you*—and your father—are interested, could not fail to be deeply interesting to me."

"They *are* interesting—and more than that, important!" she said; and as she paused, but with a hesitation that was not in any way repellent of questioning, he rejoined:

"I remember your father used to have a theory that certain secrets of the alchemists of old were not lost beyond discovery. They would be priceless secrets indeed if we could unravel them! If, instead of digging the gold out of the mines—which is pretty considerably hard work I can tell you—we could learn the making of it!"

"Which would be harder work still," she interposed; "brain study wears out the vital forces more than mere manual work!"

"The thing is, though," he observed thoughtfully, "that, the mystery once solved, the secret would lose its value."

"Yes, if it became public property!" she replied. "But the fruits of the discovery are reaped first by the discoverer."

"If he gets his rights!"

"He will not let them slip through neglect or carelessness," said Grace, with a tender smile of hope and trust. "My father thinks," she continued, "that the transmutation of gold is a hopeless dream! But there is something more precious than gold, the secret of the making of which might be learnt. You know—we all know—that the diamond is only carbon in its purest form! My father has devoted years of his life to the study of this subject. That is why he does not practise so much now; his professional duties interfered with these researches and so we came to live out here quietly. You see one cannot take these things up lightly, they demand all a life's energy and devotion. He is steadily working out his theory; I think we are getting very near the light now!" and her soft eyes lit up with a beautiful confidence.

"I see, I see!" said Harry Osmond; and he did see, not only the father's dream, but the daughter's devoted faith.

When the ice had been once broken, and it was understood that Osmond was aware of the nature of the Doctor's pursuits, he was soon taken freely into the family confidence. Grace was glad to be able to talk to some sympathetic friend upon the subject which absorbed her father's very life, and held possession, though to a lesser extent, of hers. For long years past, while the external interests of everyday existence came and went, just skimming the surface, this secret pursuit had been the whole deep under-current of their lives.

It was an incalculable comfort to Grace to feel herself free to allude openly to what hitherto had been spoken of only between father and daughter, shut down in silence and reserve.

Even the Doctor, having once broken the seal of his secrecy, also found it a relief to talk to Harry Osmond about his life-long dream, which he confidently hoped soon to realise. No one knew of the real drift of his experiments except one or two men who paid occasional long visits to the Kenricks' place, bringing with them mysterious and bulky parcels—who were assisting him in the construction of the needed apparatus, and who were sworn to secrecy; and even these had not been fully taken into his confidence. None indeed, not even Grace, knew what were the ingredients by the employment of which he hoped to bring about the desired result. That was his great secret, religiously

kept from even his beloved daughter. Whatever these ingredients were, his idea was that their mixture in certain proportions and fusion under a powerful pressure would produce the crystallisation of carbon into its purest form—the diamond.

There were, he admitted, many difficulties in the way—one hitherto insurmountable difficulty had been the application of a compressive force of sufficient power—the construction of a machine strong enough to stand the shock. But in the face of obstacle after obstacle, although “Pelion upon Ossa piled,” of difficulties towered before him, he had toiled on undaunted and indefatigable.

Patient study and practical experiment had brought him now very near the goal. The hour of success was at hand—so he assured Harry Osmond. In his laboratory even now stood a great globe of solid iron, with a passage drilled through it to a circular chamber hollowed out in the centre.

This chamber was to be charged with certain materials, the composition of which was the great secret, and its contents fired by a powerful battery.

He had tried similar experiments before, though hitherto with no other result than the shattering of the apparatus, and the smashing of windows in the neighbourhood—vigorous protests of indignant neighbours—and enforced retreat of the Doctor and his belongings to a more secluded locality.

But this time he believed he had ensured against failure. The apparatus was the strongest that could be made; the time for the final trial was almost ripe—not quite—a few more final experiments had yet to be made—one or two possibly weak points to be guarded. And here a little difficulty occurred. To finally assure himself of the security of certain parts of the theory he had so long been working out needed expensive materials. And money was scarce at Kenricks'. Only Grace, always bravely and faithfully standing between her father and all domestic anxieties from which her care could guard him, knew *how* scarce. She was up early and late, working hard to keep the household wheels running smoothly—doing all she could to save, but the poor girl could not coin money. The doctor began to chafe at feeling himself delayed and hindered in his great work by what seemed to him so petty and paltry a thing as money or the want of it.

"I have spent all my means and all the best years of my life," he said once to Harry Osmond in an unusual expansion of confidence. "The little fortune that should have been Grace's—her mother's dowry, which should have come to the child—all gone! The returns will be a thousandfold the cost—I should be a fool to grudge it—but straitened circumstances cause a little temporary annoyance and delay sometimes. My researches are expensive—they could not be carried on without diamonds. Diamond dust was the first thing necessary, and is the last—the last before the production of the perfect gem!"

It was on a Sunday, and Harry Osmond had done honour to the day, and to the object of his visit, by arraying himself in his best. He had caught a good deal of the careless lavishness of Californian mining life, and in the Laureate's words:

"A barbarous opulence, jewel-thick,  
Sunned itself on his breast and his hands!"

But Harry did not think it was barbarous at all. He had bought his diamond studs and handsome solitaire ring with his own hard-earned dollars; he took a boyish pleasure in their sparkle; and he put them on to visit Grace simply because they were the best he had. He caught a yearning glance in Dr. Kenrick's eyes as they turned for a moment on these jewels—only for a moment, and then were hastily averted, as if the Doctor were fairly tearing that eager gaze away.

"Why, now—would *these* be any use to you?" said the young man cordially.

The Doctor's eyes glistened.

"No, no!" he said, drawing back. "They would save weeks of time and labour! They would turn probability into certainty, make assurance doubly sure. But I won't—no, no, I wouldn't rob you of them, Osmond, my dear boy! Likely you set store by those stones? They may have a value to you apart from their price? and any gems I have must be pounded—pulverised! For I must test the pure dust of the diamond yet once more."

"You're right welcome," rejoined Osmond, drawing the ring off his finger.

"You mean it?" said the Doctor, evidently resisting by sheer force the impulse to pounce on the jewel.

"With all my heart," the young man protested. "Why what

earthly good can these bits of trinkets be to *me*, compared to what they'll do if they can be the slightest help to you in your important experiments? See now—here, take them all,” and he loosened the studs.

“They shall be returned ten-fold!” exclaimed Dr. Kenrick, his withered cheek flushing. “Before even Grace's dowry, these shall come back to you. Yes, ten-fold and more! I meant the first thing of all to replace my girl's little fortune that I have spent—for her good, though, all for her good! But before even that, there shall be a hundred gems for these.”

“Keep them without a thought of return,” said Harry Osmond. “I want no return—don't let such a thought into your mind. Let all, everything, be for—your daughter! Though, as to dowry, the lucky man whose lot is blessed enough to win *her*, will need no dowry with her. He'll have what's worth far more than diamonds. There's no such gem in all the mines of Golconda as Grace herself!”

“That's true—that's true enough,” Grace's father assented slowly, after a pause. “But the gem needs setting; and we shall see the day when my living jewel *will* be set and framed as she ought to be!”

“If she were framed in gold and diamonds, she couldn't be worth more than she is to-day, just as she stands, right there, in her calico gown!” Harry Osmond rejoined warmly, looking out of the open door at the girl, busy as usual at her household duties, of whom he caught a side view.

“I'm glad—I'm glad you appreciate my girl,” said the Doctor with his slow, brooding smile. “She hasn't had many to appreciate her. It would have been a dull life for her if she had been like other girls. But she's not like others. She has shared my life.”

“And I say this to you, Doctor Kenrick,” the young man answered, waxing emphatic and enthusiastic, “for that—just that—that Miss Grace shares your life, I look on you as the happiest man I know! and so I'd say still if the waters of trouble went over your head, while *she* was by your side!”

The older man looked at the young one keenly, not unkindly.

“So,” he said, with bent head and thoughtful brow, “you think that way about her, do you?”

" Could any man see her as I've seen her, and *not* think so ? " Osmond replied.

Here Grace came in, and both the men were suddenly silent, the colour deepening in Osmond's sun-bronzed cheek. His heart beat high with a hope that, when the day came that he should give words to his heart's desire to be taken into the family as something nearer and dearer than a friend, Grace's father might lend a favourable ear to his suit ; for there had certainly been nothing forbidding nor discouraging in the Doctor's manner. And Grace herself ? He hardly dared to hope—for Grace, in her gentleness, innocence, and maiden sweetness, seemed to breathe in a purer air than he did—to live in a world apart from and above him—yet, in his heart, he ventured to cherish a dream—almost too fair and ethereal and tender for him yet to seek to turn it into reality—of Grace's love.

Now, whether persuaded by the arguments of the father, or influenced by his affection for the daughter, Harry Osmond began to share—albeit less confidently than Grace—in the Doctor's hopes. The theory *did* seem plausible, as the Doctor put it. The possibility of resolving carbon into its purest form seemed a problem not past the power of man to solve. The process of crystallising carbon ! he who had discovered that, would master the art of making diamonds. Nature did it ; why might not man learn Nature's secret ? There was no great discovery that had not been laughed at when first rumoured abroad ; no feat ever achieved that had not been deemed an impossibility at first. The Doctor's theory seemed simple, could it only be carried into practice !

And now the day drew near when the great trial was to be made. Before it came, Harry made up his mind to speak to Grace. He told her, in the rough and broken phrases that are the eloquence of deep feeling, how dear she was to him, and that she would be even dearer still, if by any mischance the experiment that was to crown her father's lifelong ambition resulted in failure—that neither failure nor success, fortune made nor lost, neither prosperity nor ruin, could or should ever make the slightest difference between them—if only she could care for him. He knew she could not leave her father while the great question was unsettled ; he would never ask her to desert the old man, nor to fail in that daughterly devotion which was the first thing

for which he had loved her ; he only asked her to give him a grain of hope to live on—only wished her to know that he was hers, heart and soul, and hers only, for ever, whatever might be “ the end of that day’s business ! ” And, if all he asked to make him happy was hope, he was more than happy when he pressed his first kiss on Grace’s sweet lips, and knew that he had won the love that was his heart’s desire.

Of course, she could not enter into any thoughts of marriage in the present state of things. While her father’s aim was unattained, the result of his long labours uncertain, her place was by his side. But now the crisis was near. If all went well, and the great object were successfully accomplished, then—then they might—talk things over. And Osmond, having gained all, and more than all, that he had dared to hope for, was well content and light of heart when the day for the important ordeal came.

Two friends of the Doctor, who had assisted him in the construction of the apparatus, came to help in its transportation to a safe distance from the house. They conveyed it out by twilight to a lonely spot, secure from interruption.

The Doctor had charged the central chamber with the composition, of which the ingredients and their proportions and preparation constituted his great secret. This charge was to be fired and fused by means of a galvanic battery. They laid the connecting wires, and fixed the battery at what the Doctor deemed a prudent distance from the machine. They stood round the battery in the deepening dusk, a silent and anxious group of four men, and a woman—for Grace would not be left behind, Harry Osmond looked at her as she stood by her father’s side ; and even in the twilight he saw, if with his mind’s eye rather than with his bodily sight, the loyal loving look on her pale face, the steadfast light in her shining eyes. He took a step that brought him between her and the machine—to shield her, so far as he could, in case of any accident.

The Doctor touched the handle of the battery. There was a crash and a blinding cloud of dust. For a moment the watchers caught their breath, and, with one impulse, drew closer together. Then the Doctor, shaking himself free from Grace’s clinging hold, seized the lantern and rushed forward. The iron globe had burst, and lay in pieces. He knelt down to examine the fragments, and the rays of the light wavered and flickered as the

hand that held the lantern shook. Osmond, the first to follow him, took the lantern from his trembling fingers, and stooped to help in the examination. The others joined, and all eagerly inspected and searched among the scattered fragments of the broken machine.

Not a word was spoken until Grace at last whispered, softly touching Harry's arm :

"Is there—is there—any sign—of success?"

He looked round at her and hesitated, in anxious silence, for a moment or two; then, as no one else answered, he said reluctantly :

"I am afraid—there—there doesn't seem to be any—any result."

But the Doctor knelt and patiently and persistently sought amongst the shattered pieces still.

"Father, dear," Grace presently whispered tenderly, "hadn't we better be going home?"

"I must look by daylight," he said, taking no notice of her words. "It's impossible to make a full search by this light. I must wait till daylight."

"Yes," said Osmond, "we'll come back early in the morning."

"Come back?" the Doctor repeated. "I shall not stir from this place! Leave it—here—now—all night? No; I wait here. You can all go home. I stay where I am."

The others remonstrated.

"You can't do it, Doctor!" urged Harry Osmond. "Think of your daughter! You can't leave her all night alone in that lonely house! It can't be done. It's impossible!"

"I can't leave this place," the Doctor repeated doggedly.

Grace laid her fingers lightly on her father's shoulder, and gently but firmly took the matter into her own hands.

"I will go home and fetch some blankets and things, and come back here and camp out with father," she said.

And so it was decided; it seemed, indeed, the best way. It was a fine night—a clear, dry, and dewless California night; and although Harry did not at all like the idea of Grace "roughing it" and camping out, he still could not but admit that it would probably do her no harm. The other men proposed division of forces, one of them remaining with the Doctor, the other accompanying Grace and Osmond to the house to fetch wraps, cover-

ings, and comforts for the night ; but finally the whole quartette set off on this errand, the Doctor protesting he would rather be left alone awhile, and Osmond being strongly of the mind that four are much better company than three.

He walked with Grace, and did his best to cheer her with the idea that failure might be only a temporary postponement of the attainment of the longed-for end. They returned laden with materials for rigging up a sort of tent for Grace, and plenty of wraps for her father. Harry Osmond said that he too would camp out that night ; the other two men, having given their assistance in the arrangements, decided to go home to their hotel ; they possibly thought the daylight investigation was not worth waiting for. With Western taciturnity and good-feeling they did not say much, but bade the Doctor "keep up his spirits—he'd do it yet—maybe !" added the less sanguine of the two.

The level rays of the morning sun were streaming broad and bright across the valley, and Harry Osmond, rolled up in his Mexican blanket, was sleeping soundly still. In his dreams he heard the name so often in his mind, of which his heart was so full that it seemed only natural it should echo in his sleep ! But the sound grew louder—the call pierced through the shadows of dreamland.

"Grace ! child ! wake up ! Grace — Osmond — look here ! *look here !*"

"Eh—what ? What's up ?" exclaimed Harry starting, and scrambling out of his blanket.

The Doctor's worn face was flushed and transfigured with a look of wild hope and trembling joy ; his eyes shone with a strange light, as if his whole being were strained to the very verge of sanity. In the palm of his quivering hand he held out to show them a pinch of sparkling dust.

Grace and Harry hastened to inspect the glistening atoms. Somehow they carefully avoided looking in each other's eyes. That tiny pinch of shining dust—was it in very truth real diamond dust ?

Grace strove to convince herself that she had no doubt. She could not dash her father's joy by a question of it. He knew best. She soon persuaded herself to share his confidence. He harped exultantly on the theme all the way home. The experiment had been no failure. Here, in these few grains of

glittering dust, was the successful result! The only drawback was that the result was small—certainly very small. This was the pure material of the diamond—only there was so very little of it! A little more care, a little harder study, a little change in the conditions, a stronger machine—so strong as to stand the shock without bursting and thus diffusing the force! and next time they would see the success of which these atoms gave the sure and certain promise!

He was so confident that Harry Osmond, who had at first looked doubtfully at the little pinch of precious dust, began to be persuaded—or at least in his heart regarded it as an open question. It might indeed be as the doctor declared it was. On the other hand, Osmond could not entirely exclude, from his mind a suspicion that it might be only some fragment of felspar—some grain of crystal or quartz pulverised by the shock. There were rocks and stones around the spot; scattered from amongst these some chip of bright quartz or other sparkling mineral might have found its way close to the machine, there lain unperceived, and been found amongst the splintered pieces.

Of the other two confidants who were made aware of the result of the experiment, one inclined to this theory, the other rather supported and shared the Doctor's hope.

After this eventful night the Doctor resumed his studies and experiments with renewed energy. With wild and feverish eagerness he devoted himself to the pursuit of that long-sought object on which it seemed to him now that his hand was at last about to close.

Was it a will-o'-the-wisp that lured him on?—a delusive phantom of fame and fortune that he so doggedly and desperately pursued? Harry Osmond conscientiously endeavoured to shut his ears to this question whenever it occurred to him; the entertaining it appeared to him almost in the light of a sort of disloyalty to Grace.

The difficulty of constructing an apparatus of sufficient strength to stand the shock that his trusted globe of iron had proved incapable of bearing, exercised the Doctor's mind, and presently he formed a plan. Some distance down the valley, near the opening of a wide gully leading back into the hills, a most lonely and deserted spot, was a stretch of barren, stony land strewn with great rocks and boulders. On these the Doctor cast his eye.

The loneliness of the situation attracted him. Here were no neighbours to spy and interfere, and very little probability of being intruded upon by even a solitary passer-by. He proposed to utilize one of the largest boulders for his purpose. A hole was to be drilled deep into the heart of the solid rock, into this molten iron was to be poured; then through the cooled iron a passage was to be bored, and the chamber to hold the secret composition scooped out in the centre. Finally, the rock itself was to be bound round with broad and massive clamps of iron. By means of this device he was convinced he could employ a battery of even greater power than before, without risk of the bursting to pieces of the apparatus.

To carry out this scheme, of course, needed help. Those who were already in his confidence were ready with their assistance; but more still was needed to accomplish such a task; it was found desirable to take another, a strong and skilful workman, into the plan, and then yet another and another were introduced, until the Doctor was at the head of a little band of half-a-dozen men, strong and willing, and putting hand and heart to the work, all being aware of the object of their toil, and promised an ample share in the profits of the enterprise; but none, of course, having the slightest inkling of the component parts of the preparation which was Dr. Kenrick's secret.

Money the Doctor had none to give his assistants; but he was lavish in promises of their part in the coming fortune—not merely verbal promises, but formal written assignments of certain proportions of all profits to his partners in the undertaking, which was, as he fondly hoped, sure to be crowned with success.

Those who had believed in him, and worked with and for him, should be no losers. So, one or two for old friendship's sake, some acting on a real belief in the Doctor's enterprise, more out of vague hopes that it might come to something—the little company worked with a will. They set up a regular camping-ground at the mouth of the gully, close to the scene of operations, so as to ensure that there should be no chance of any tampering with their work through mischief or curiosity, and also to avoid the necessity of carrying tools and materials to and fro. And day after day the work progressed; the Doctor watched it with the fever-fire of hope burning day by day

ever brighter in his eyes, and Grace watched *him* with ever-deepening tenderness and cherishing care.

Meanwhile, the story of the mysterious work going on at the Black Gully leaked out in the neighbourhood ; those who thought that " Old Man Kenrick had a bee in his bonnet " were more sure of it than ever ; and now that he had induced others to join him, it was observed that " the complaint was catching "—" birds of a feather "—" one crank made many," and so on.

The Doctor and his faithful band worked on, indifferent to babbling tongues. None could *know* the secret ; and people might guess about it as they chose. Harry Osmond sometimes marked the Doctor's sanguine mood—never before so confident as now—with a vague feeling of trouble. If anything should go wrong now, how heavily the blow would fall ! Dr. Kenrick would spend hours discussing his plans, and jotting down notes of his proposed movements in the good time that was coming. The discharge of his debt to Osmond—the restoration of Grace's dowry—the division of profits among his fellow workers—he would dwell glowingly upon these, and other features of the prospect. The very first diamond was to be set as a pin or ring for Grace. His girl was to shine in the world yet as she deserved ; his jewel should be set and framed according to its value !

The plan he proposed was not to flood the market at once with diamonds, and thus cause sensation, curiosity, perhaps suspicion and unpleasant rumour. The members of the company were to place themselves separately in communication with different firms of jewel-merchants, and the diamonds were to be sent for disposal a few at a time.

Grace always listened sympathetically to her father's eager setting forth of his schemes. Sometimes her spirit rose up buoyantly in a mood of hope, and the brilliant prospects his sanguine imagination painted seemed real and near to her ! In other moods she dared not dwell on these bright pictures, lest they should melt away like a mirage. It had been easier for her to soothe, cheer and encourage her father in his occasional days of depression and gloom in the past, than it was to share now in his exhilaration of hope. But, underneath all her anxiety at this trying time, she had one deep, sweet thought—

one treasure folded in her heart, that was her comfort and her strength. With that mainstay of life to support her, what was there she could not bear? All else of life might be built on shifting and uncertain sands; other hopes might break, like reeds; but she leant upon the rock of Harry's love and faith. And he, for his part, had made up his mind to one thing—that neither success nor failure should part him and Grace. In success, he knew that she would cling to him; in failure, he would stand by her and her father. If failure were by ill chance the end of all the Doctor's hopes, then his love might comfort her, his friendship help her father.

A man of smaller, narrower mind might have been jealous of the place her father held in the heart of his betrothed; for although marriage-plans were, by mutual consent, postponed "until things were a little more settled"—as they vaguely put it—Harry and Grace were openly affianced lovers now, and never were lovers more united. Harry was too generous and large-hearted to begrudge Grace's devotion to the old man who stood, but for her, alone in the world; he held her only the dearer for the loyalty with which she clung to her father, and refused even, for true love's sake, to contemplate the idea of leaving him to struggle on alone through the weary days of unrest—of hope deferred.

And the time slipped away, and the long-anticipated day of the great trial came at last.

"You're pale, my darling," said Harry Osmond, tenderly, to his betrothed. "Don't fret yourself with anxiety! Nothing's worth fretting your sweet self about! Success means fame and fortune; but *we* have what is dearer than fame—and more than all the money in the world could buy for us! Why, all the dollars that could be coined out of the deepest vein of gold that was ever struck, couldn't buy one grain of love like ours!"

"It is not money—no, nor fame! that I care for," murmured Grace; "it is that my father's very life is bound up in this!"

"It will all go well, dearest. You'll see it will be all right," he answered, soothingly, anxious to re-assure her, although he felt in his heart that he was not so very sure himself.

And now the hour had come!

The great battery—a more powerful one than on the previous occasion—was prepared, and the lengths of wire laid in com-

munication with the huge rock, clamped around with its iron bands, in the heart of which lay the Doctor's life's secret, his life's hope. Again an anxious group stood gathered around the apparatus—a larger group than before, as all the little company of adventurers had assembled for the final trial.

This time it was broad daylight. Dr. Kenrick, taking warning from his experiences on the occasion of the former trial, had resolved not to trust again to lantern light for the important examination of the results.

It was early morning; the soft mists of an opalescent dawn still clung about the valley; the rising sun shed its rosy and purple rays upon the barren hills and clothed them in a tender radiance; even the yellow withered grass on the plain took hues of gold in the iridescent haze of morning. The soft and cloudless sky seemed a smile of promise!

Grace smiled too, tenderly, trustfully, soothingly, as she looked in her father's flushed face and eager fever-bright eyes, and drawing close to his side she stole her hand into his.

Dead silence had fallen upon all the group.

They glanced from the great rock to the battery with its motionless wires, from the battery to the lever-handle in the Doctor's hand.

A moment, and he grasped and pressed it.

There was a deafening, rending crash, that shook the solid earth beneath their feet and darkened the sky above their heads. Not a man kept footing or breath or sense in the terrific concussion. Riven rock and shattered iron flew high and wide. Far off, birds fell dead from the shock, and the alarmed neighbours from many a mile around started for the scene of disaster.

But long before the nearest neighbour on the fleetest horse could reach the spot, the stunned and bruised members of the company of fortune-seekers had picked themselves up from the ground—all but one!—and the worst was known.

Harry Osmond, for a few moments stunned and dazed, but otherwise uninjured, sat up and looked round for Grace. Side by side, as they had stood, father and daughter had fallen, and both lay motionless. Harry staggered over to them, and fell on his knees by Grace.

In a minute or two, the Doctor also moved, sighed, raised

himself on his elbow, and when the mists had cleared from his dazed eyes, and he looked at the little group beside him, he dragged himself up and bent over his daughter.

"Grace, why Gracie!" he said hoarsely. "She's fainted, the poor child! Come, Gracie, rouse up, my girl! speak to me! Why do you look like that, Harry? She's only fainted—girls often faint! why even I—I—was a little faint and giddy myself! Come, Gracie, my brave girl, rouse up! open your eyes and speak to your old father!"

But Grace would never open her eyes and speak to him, nor to any other, any more in this world. A large splinter of iron had struck her on the head. Life pulsed feebly on at her heart for awhile, a little while; but she never gave word or look or sign of consciousness again.

A few days after the tragic event of this too-memorable night, one of the leading jewellers in San Francisco was called into the parlour behind his "store" to see a gentleman who wished to speak to him on particular business. The visitor, an old man with white hair and beard and bright, restless eyes, looked haggard, untidy, dusty and travel-worn, but his manner was unmistakeably that of a gentleman, as he informed the jeweller that the business on which he had called was the disposal of some splendid diamonds.

"It is a rare chance I have to offer you," he said, fumbling in his breast and producing a little wash-leather bag. "They are perfect stones, of the purest water. I think you'll say you have never seen finer diamonds. I have only brought a few for your inspection; but there are more where these came from! I would not part with them, but they are my daughter's dowry; I want to turn them into hard cash for her. My intention," he continued, untying the knotted string of the little bag with eager fingers, "is to keep a few of the very finest stones to be set for her as a bridal present to wear on her wedding-day, and turn all the rest into hard dollars for her dowry."

The jeweller nodded, not unsympathetically. He had daughters himself, and was not unaccustomed to listening to curious and romantic stories from people who brought various precious stones to offer him, and who generally insisted on ex-

plaining how it came to pass that they desired to dispose of their valuables.

"Well, let us look at them," he said.

The old man carefully poured the contents of his bag upon the table.

The jeweller frowned impatiently, with disgusted surprise. He did not mind a good joke, but this was an excessively poor one—the poorest of practical jokes, to befool him into listening to a tale of diamonds, and then turn out some broken bits of a common glass bottle! A few splinters of a smashed bottle—a paltry, shabby jest indeed!

He was pushing the glittering fragments away roughly, with an angry look of contempt, when he noticed the fond and almost ecstatic look the visitor bent on his bits of bottle-glass, the earnest, exultant, agitated tone in which he was dilating on the perfection of these priceless and flawless gems.

The jeweller's frown softened into an expression of pitying comprehension. He saw now that this was no jest.

When Harry Osmond, who had followed fast upon the Doctor's track, traced him that evening, he found him in a small room at one of the best hotels, counting over his treasures, apparently perfectly happy. The compassionate jeweller had humoured his delusion and got rid of him under some excuse of delay—had even sent one of his young clerks to follow at a little distance, to see that the poor old man came to no harm, and ascertain where he went.

The Doctor greeted Osmond kindly, and told him that Grace would be coming soon, but he didn't want her to hurry until he had had her diamonds set for her.

Harry stayed with him and took care of him.

For a day or two his happy, sanguine mood lasted; then his spirits began to fail; he grew restless, moped, and had long fits of silence, during which he would sit staring before him with a blank look of vacant melancholy.

"I wish Gracie would come," he said one evening, after one of those long silences. He looked pitifully haggard and faded and helpless, as he sat heaped up limply in his arm-chair. "I feel to-night that I'm old, and lonely and ailing. People are very kind—but it's my own flesh and blood I want now. Seems to

me that Grace is a long time. I hope she will come soon, and I'll go home with her."

Harry Osmond took the old Doctor's cold and trembling hand and held it in his own strong warm clasp.

"It won't be very long, I think, before Grace is with you again," he said, with a little quiver in his voice. "And meanwhile, you'll let me stay with you, and I'll look after you and try to be all a son could be to you, until—until Grace comes to fetch you home."

It was a long time that the broken old man lingered, helpless and harmless, bereft of reason and strength, in a world wherein he had no longer part nor place ; but Harry Osmond kept his word, and devoted himself to the care of this poor wreck of life until the summons came that re-united father and daughter, and Dr. Kenrick's Great Secret died with him.

## The Mystery of King's Bench Walk.

By BRITIFFE SKOTTOWE.

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A BARRISTER without chambers in one of the Inns of Court is, *briefly* speaking, a forensic suicide. The formation of a business connection and practice at the Bar is almost as much dependent on the possession of chambers, as the attainment of the dignity of the wig and gown itself is on the eating of dinners. A barrister who received his clients in a three-pair back in some narrow street off the Strand would not be likely to command the confidence of moneyed persons. A barrister who made appointments in the coffee-rooms of public-houses in the same locality could not reasonably expect to be the hope and stay of injured or indignant ladies. The most shining light of the Bar, moreover, would suffer under an imputation of idle frivolity and useless ostentation if, instead of the classic shades of the Inns of Court, he preferred the gilded apartments of the new monster hotels on the Embankment as his place of consultation. So much seemed obvious to the meanest capacity. When therefore I had successfully grappled with the "Bar Exam.," and emerged—technically at least—from the state of pupillage, I decided that the first and most important step in my career at the Bar must be the acquisition of a tenancy of chambers in the Temple.

Hitherto I had had but a slight acquaintance with the Temple for though I was actually a member of the Inner Division of that Worshipful Society, and had in due course consumed, under the eye of the Benchers in Hall, the exact number of dinners which are supposed to form a firm and suitable foundation for a legal education, I had always "read in chambers" with a well-known man in Gray's Inn, and in consequence only came within the precincts of my own Alma Mater on very rare occasions. Beyond, therefore, a general knowledge of its geography, and a more intimate acquaintance with one or two sets of rooms which were tenanted by friends of mine, I knew very little more about this ancient structure than an inquiring American tourist might

easily pick up in a very short time with the help of a porter and a guide-book. I was, therefore, quite unprepared to find that it was by no means so easy to obtain good residential chambers within the bounds of the Temple as I had imagined. If I had merely wanted a small room as an office with the privilege of putting up my name under that of my landlord on the outer door of the set, my wishes could have been easily satisfied, for quite a dozen full-blown barristers of eminence would have been willing to gratify them with alacrity. Complete sets, however, were few and far between, and those which were vacant, proved to be either the dingiest of attics hidden away in the roof, or so limited in dimensions that they seemed to me only fit for store-closets. I rejected them all in turn, and had almost decided to give up the idea of residing in the Temple for the present and content myself with an office until a better opportunity offered, when my informant added—apparently quite as an afterthought :

“There’s No. 14 King’s Bench Walk, you know. Would you care for that?”

He spoke so doubtfully, that I answered testily :

“If it is another of those wretched attics, you may save yourself the trouble. That sort of thing won’t do.”

“I don’t mean the attics. *They* are taken. I mean the—the first floor right.”

Now it was so obvious that he had altered the last words of the sentence by an afterthought, that I scrutinised him inquiringly in the hope of arriving at his motive.

It seemed to me that he also scrutinised me inquiringly, nay expectantly. I disappointed his expectation, whatever it was, by remaining silent.

“First floor right, No. 14 King’s Bench Walk—you know,” he repeated in an expressionless voice that was annoying to my curiosity.

“As a matter of fact, I know nothing at all about it,” I returned, “except that if the rooms are a decent size, the first floor will probably suit me ; but if they are not you can save yourself and me the trouble of going over them.”

“Oh Lord love you,” said the man, apparently surprised out of his reserve. It seemed to me that he must have formed a secret conviction that I really did *not* want rooms, was only playing at

taking them in fact. "They are large enough. It isn't that——" He stopped abruptly.

"What is it, then?" I demanded, much mystified.

"Nothing," he replied with suspicious glibness. "Only they—haven't been let for some little time, and—are consequently a little—out of repair. However, that's easily remedied—and the rent will be lower of course in consideration."

"Nothing to do with drains?" I suggested nervously. Drains were the one point on which I was vulnerable, and it seemed to me highly probable that drainage would be bad in the Temple. "Because if so, you are aware——"

"Oh, de—ah, no!" he replied eagerly. "Besides," he added, "the Benchers will put the place in thorough repair for you, and you can have the drains inspected by the sanitary inspector if you like to pay his fee."

That sounded fair enough. Yet I could have sworn from the man's manner that there was some decided drawback to those rooms. What it was I could not divine, and it was quite obvious that he would not tell me. The best course, therefore, was to first inspect them superficially myself, and then have them carefully examined by an expert. I suggested this view.

"Of course," he agreed. "That's the right way. You ought to see them. But not this evening, not in the dark."

It was then about five o'clock, but darkness had already closed in on us as is its habit in the London winter. Still it was really quite early.

"Give the rooms a chance," he continued earnestly. "In this light you will be fancying that they are worse than they are, or may be, better than they are. Call again to-morrow morning and see them in daylight, sir. Then you can form a really fair view. Besides," he added—seeing that I looked dissatisfied—"office hours are over to-day, and I want to get home."

More than ever convinced that there was some decided defect which he merely wanted time to cover over, I yielded to the inevitable and made an appointment for the next morning.

It must be confessed that when the rooms were actually exhibited to me, I felt very much inclined to laugh out loud at Mr. Hadgrave's folly and my own. Hadgrave was the official's name. The rooms were really very fine rooms, comprising a set of four good chambers, a passage and a box-like arrangement at the end

which was intended as an office for a clerk. The big front room which looked out on the Walk was quite a large apartment—as rooms in the Temple go—and was panelled throughout in a very flat, ugly style with heavy black oak. A more dark, dingy, cold, cheerless, nay positively forbidding abode, however, I had never seen before outside the Tower of London. The chill was so great on entering that I felt a cold shiver stealing convulsively down my spine. But this was not to be wondered at. The rooms had been unlet for a long time, so Mr. Hadgrave had admitted. For a corresponding period, therefore, they had not been warmed by fire or light of any kind, and it was only natural that in the absence of their hated enemies, the cold and damp should have entered in and settled down there in grim companionship. The windows, moreover, were grimy with accumulated dirt which almost excluded the wholesome light of the sun. They had evidently not been subjected to any process of cleansing for ages, and their dingy condition was quite enough in itself to account for the gloom in which the room was enveloped. The dusky hue of the panelled walls added to the sombre effect, which was completed by the absence of any relief in the shape of furniture with the exception of two heavy old oak presses which might easily have been mistaken for sarcophagi, and some equally heavy shelves fixed into a depression in the wall. A vast chimney-piece of antique style, that would not have done discredit to an old Scotch castle, completed the *tout ensemble*, which was dreary and desolate in the extreme.

I took in the requirements of the situation at a glance, and with a general's eye rapidly sketched out my plan of campaign. Soap and water vigorously applied to those grimy windows would work a miracle by itself in the appearance of the room. A roaring fire burning in the grate would soon dispel the influence of the frost and fog demons which now pervaded the atmosphere. A Turkey carpet stretched over the bare boards, a cartload of furniture—old oak, as far as possible, to match the panelling—scattered judiciously about, a *portière* disposed gracefully over the door, curtains to match arranged about the windows, a few brass sconces, brackets and shields stuck about in crafty positions, and a good picture or two set against the panelling—a radical reform of this character would effect

wonders, and transform this scene of gloom and desolation into a comfortable nineteenth-century sitting-room, flavoured with a most delightful whiff of antiquity.

I communicated my views to Mr. Hadgrave, but he did not enter into my raptures at all. If his behaviour had been singular before, it was perfectly phenomenal now. He seemed to take a malign and exceedingly unprofessional pleasure in damping my ardour and drawing my attention to unimportant defects. He pointed out that the panelling was probably rotten at the back, and might prove unhealthy, and that it was sure to be full of blackbeetles and rats, which might make uncanny noises at night. He suggested that these big chimneys really gave out very little heat, and admitted a great deal of draught; and that what I ought to do would be to put in one of the new Oxford fireplaces which gave out so much warmth, and which would, of course, have clashed most hideously with the general effect of antiquity which I was so anxious to preserve. He wound up by saying that if I would take his advice I should pull down all that rotten panelling, have up the boards, scrub and wash the entire room—floor, walls and ceiling—fit it up again with a bright wall-paper, pretty furniture and a modern grate, and then it would be fit to live in.

He was evidently a Vandal of the first order, so I did not argue the point. I merely smiled and said I thought I preferred my own scheme.

He replied civilly :

"Very well, sir. Of course you know your own mind best."

In spite of my *entêtement*, something quite indefinable in his manner affected me so much that I exclaimed :

"I wonder what on earth it is you are hiding from me? Do you know of any positive reason why I should not take the rooms?"

He bristled up a little at this and replied stiffly :

"No, sir. I do not *know* of any positive reason why you should not take the rooms."

I came to a quick determination.

"I will make inquiries," I said. "I have friends in the Temple. I will consult them. If I am satisfied with the result I will take the rooms."

He inclined his head with an air of gentle resignation.

"That will be the best way," he said.

However, my evil fortune willed it that Wilson, who had lived several years in Pump Court and so was quite an old inhabitant, was out of Town, and thus my principal hope was frustrated. Jack Bulteel, whom I called on next, and, by a miracle, found in his chambers, was one of those people who are endowed with such high spirits that it is utterly impossible for them to consider anything seriously. When you wish to be amused their flow of conversation is charming, but when you are in a serious mood they drive you to distraction. Jack, moreover, was one of those so-called barristers who have no practice and never make any effort to obtain any, and who keep rooms in the Temple simply as a reason for coming there as seldom as possible—so far, that is, as their conduct can be said to be guided by any definite motive at all. Jack, moreover, was in his least rational mood. He had just come back from the country. He was off again in two days, and was in the highest spirits. He evidently knew very little about the Temple, and beyond the fact that there *was* a King's Bench Walk on the other side—he was in the Garden Court—had never heard anything with regard to the locality in which my chambers (I had already begun to think of them as mine) were situated. This, however, did not prevent his indulging in a dozen grotesque suggestions, each more preposterous than the last, which were all evidently discharged on the inspiration of the moment from a too fertile imagination. He was especially prolific with ghostly possibilities, and offered to me in turns, as possible bogies for the vacant set, the spectres of the wicked Templar in *Ivanhoe*, of a judge who had wilfully hanged the wrong man, a briefless barrister who had blown his brains out in despair, and a laundress who had murdered her tenant in order to steal his tea and whisky. I should probably have gone away in an exceedingly bad temper with him, but that, just as my patience was exhausted, a more practical suggestion struck him, prompted, I fancy, by the least practical of those which had preceded.

"Why not consult the present laundress," he said. "She ought to be able to give you all the information there is to give—and a good deal more."

The idea seemed a good one. We adjourned, therefore, in search of the laundress of No. 14, King's Bench Walk.

We found her in her own den at the foot of the stairs. She proved to be a grimy and rather grumpy female, with a hoarse voice and an aggressive manner. She was, apparently, in a bad temper, and was also labouring under a delusion that we were robbers or spies in disguise. Instead of replying to our questions, she insisted on knowing in what way the rooms concerned us. Even the administration of a tip did not mollify her or induce her to talk. Nor was it till I incautiously admitted that I had some intention of taking the rooms myself, that her tongue was loosened.

Then she broke out in unqualified praise of the rooms, and roundly asserted that "that old Hadgrave" had a spite against *her*, and so *wouldn't* let them—solely with the view of annoying her. I am afraid that if it had occurred to me at the time that Mrs. Hopkins had a much more tangible interest in inducing me to take the rooms and thereby securing the additional fees, than Mr. Hadgrave could possibly have in "spiting" her, I should not perhaps, have attached so much weight to her harangue. As it was, however, it satisfied me completely, and decided me to follow out the course of action which my own inclination already prompted.

In short I returned again to Mr. Hadgrave's office and when I emerged from it I was the legal tenant of the first floor right in No. 14, King's Bench Walk, in the Inner Temple.

A fortnight's judicious labour produced a marvellous change in the appearance of the rooms, and transformed them not merely into a habitable dwelling, but a very comfortable one. The two big outer chambers were fitted up respectively as a drawing-room and library—the latter being chiefly designed to impress prospective clients—while the two inner ones, which opened one out of the other with an approach from the library, were to be bedroom and snugery. I had a presentiment that the big drawing-room would prove very difficult to warm thoroughly, and I thought the snugery would prove a comfortable den in frosty weather. I must add that the oak panelling, which I was so proud of, did not extend beyond the two outer rooms, and I arranged the snugery therefore as an oriental smoking-room—placed Indian mats on the walls, strewed Persian rugs on the floor, and fitted in divans and inlaid tables wherever there seemed to be a place for them.

Even at this moment, with my vision cleared by experience, I cannot see that during the whole period of preparation, the faintest note of warning was given to me.

It is true that I was at the Temple only during the day, and that I foolishly omitted to make any further inquiries.

I remember that one day as I was bidding the laundress pile up the coals well on the fire before she left for the night, in the hope of driving out some of the damp and intolerable chill which seemed still to pervade the big room, she replied almost insolently : " 'Tain't a bit of use, sir."

"What do you mean?" I said exceedingly angry, for I fancied I had detected a tendency to covert insolence on her part before and was determined to put an end to it at once.

She saw her mistake, and assuming her most fawning manner assured me that all that she meant was that fires never burnt long when left to themselves.

I also remember that as I was directing one of the workmen how to place the pictures on the walls of the big room, he suddenly turned to me and remarked, as it seemed to me, *apropos de rien* :

"You bain't a nervous gent at all, be you, sir?"

"No," I replied, "I should say not"—then, suspecting some covert allusion, I added, "But why do you ask?"

"It strikes me, sir," he answered with a very grave air, "that this yere ramshackle old Temple must be a lonesome plice to be shut up all alone in at night and this yere part ain't none the least lonesome."

"Oh, I'm not afraid," I said laughing, and then, noticing the exceedingly earnest gaze which he had fixed on me, I became suddenly grave as well. After all, I thought, he may be speaking for conversation's sake, or there may be some more definite idea in his mind—it is impossible to say what. I continued therefore deliberately : "I am a very light sleeper, and I always have a loaded revolver quite close to me at night. Besides I have been the champion heavy-weight at Jim the Slogger's boxing-school for the last two years, so I am not likely to be nervous about burglars, if that is what you mean."

He contemplated me with a ruminating, uncertain air, and then uttering a short laugh, resumed his work with the trite observation :

"Well, sir, you know your own mind best, in course." It seemed to me, however, to be absolutely meaningless.

In spite of the naturally dilatory habits of the British working-man, the furnishing operations were accomplished at last, and I became the occupant as well as tenant of the renovated rooms.

I was just going to shut my outer door on the world for the first time, when the door opposite opened suddenly, and a jaunty little man came out. He stopped short at the sight of me, stared at me curiously, and then raised his hat politely.

"You are the new tenant, I presume?"

I assented.

"I admire your enterprise," he continued, "and should be proud of your acquaintance. We are neighbours, and we ought to be friends."

In brief this little man's jaunty manner took my fancy, and we speedily became friends. He invited me into his rooms, and later we adjourned to mine.

"You like them?" he inquired when I had shewn him round my new domain.

"Yes."

"Find them quite comfortable?"

"They ought to be. If not, it is easily remedied."

"Ah! Don't find them at all cold or dark in the evening?" he suggested with a sly look.

"The big room is cold, certainly. I don't expect that I shall use it much in winter. As for it's being dark in the evening, I should say that that was chiefly a question of lamps;—but I haven't spent an evening here yet, as it happens."

"Ah," he observed, looking at me with extraordinary gravity, as though pondering some weighty problem, "ye—es, exactly. Of course you—" he began abruptly, and then as abruptly stopped.

I gazed at him stupidly.

"You were going to say," I suggested.

"Nothing," he continued with some slight confusion. "It is no business of mine. That is, I mean that I was going to ask you if you were a stranger here, for I don't know your face. But of course you have friends in the Temple?"

"Yes."

"Exactly, of course. You will forgive my curiosity I am sure."

He seemed quite relieved to find that I had friends in the Temple. Evidently a most philanthropic person. Or possibly, as the attributes are very indistinctly separated, only a very eccentric or inquisitive one.

He was much pleased with my brand new law library, but suggested that I ought to get a few dusty old tomes at some second-hand shop which would fill up the lower shelves very effectively, and impart an air of graceful antiquity and profound erudition to the whole which could not fail to produce a most salutary impression on my clients.

"When they come," I added.

"Oh, they'll come, never fear."

We passed into the big room and it was borne in upon me more decidedly than before, that it would be very difficult to warm it thoroughly. A big fire had been blazing there intermittently for a week, and yet it had made but a slight impression on the damp chill which pervaded the atmosphere. The fire moreover did not prosper in the huge, draughty fireplace, and it was evident that the pleasure of preserving this picturesque piece of antiquity would have to be purchased at the expense of a certain amount of discomfort.

"Cold, isn't it?" said my companion, glancing at me under his eye-brows. He shivered slightly as he spoke.

"Very cold," I assented. "I expect that I shall be obliged to import a gas-stove."

He shrugged his shoulders and went out. On the common landing he turned and said to me with great gravity:

"Of course you are the best judge of your own affairs, but I wouldn't live in a place like that if I was paid to do it. That big room is enough to give one the shivers of itself."

I smiled confidently in reply.

"It will be very different in a week or two."

"Well, well," he returned, "I suppose it is bad taste to talk of the gallows in the family of a man who has been hanged."

I laughed feebly at this weak and not very *à propos* joke.

"I must be off home," he continued, drawing on his gloves.

"Don't you live here?"

"No!" most emphatically. "Not I—I am only here in the day."

At the end of my first week's residence, the conclusions I

arrived at were threefold ; first that the big room would never be really a comfortable apartment in winter, secondly, that living alone in the Temple had a tendency to make one unaccountably nervous and imaginative at night, and thirdly, that a private servant, who would be on the premises at all hours, was becoming an absolute necessity if only to keep the fires in when I went out in the evening. It was in fact very annoying to come home, perhaps nearly frozen, about eleven or twelve o'clock at night and find the fire completely out, the embers black in the grate and an atmosphere of frost and fog pervading the room, precisely as if the windows had been thrown open to the night air for hours.

Even if I succeeded in relighting the fire and coaxing some semblance of a cheery blaze back into the grate, experience proved that it took a long time to produce any appreciable impression on the damp chill with which the atmosphere of the room was completely saturated.

It dawned on me one night, to my intense disgust, that I was growing nervous, and that my nervousness was assuming a form which is only excusable in a hysterical woman or a frightened child. On this particular evening I dined in the hall, and instead of going out afterwards, as was my usual custom, returned to my chambers with the intention of devoting the evening to study.

The fire was laid in the big room, but not in the snugger—a piece of unwarrantable carelessness on the part of Mrs. Hopkins. However, I felt that it would be an excellent opportunity to give the big room the benefit of a blaze of sustained strength and duration.

There was an ample supply of illuminating power when my preparations were complete, for I lighted three lamps in different parts of the room in order to increase the volume of heat.

I took down *Tompkins on Trusts*, a very solid legal authority, which I considered it advisable, from a professional point of view, to acquire an intimate acquaintance with, and which with this object I intended to devote the evening to “mugging up.”

There was nothing romantic about Tompkins' subject or imaginative about his style. Both were as dull and prosaic as law itself. There was about as much food for the fancy in his solid pages as might be furnished by a gas-pipe or the butt-end of a stone-breaker's hammer.

And yet, by the time I had toiled through half-a-dozen pages, I became aware that the subject had altogether escaped my grasp, and that my brain, instead of pondering on legal axioms and subtleties, was giving way to the most fantastic illusions that ever troubled a monomaniac. I was continually oppressed with the feeling, that out of the corners of my eyes, as it were, I could see a vague, shadowy form bending over my shoulder and standing between me and the light. Again and again I started suddenly round in my chair so vivid was the illusion, only, however, to find that my imagination must have played me a trick, and to vent my denunciations on my folly which allowed me to be thus victimised. But as often as I turned my attention once more to Tompkins, and endeavoured to absorb myself in the relations between trustee and cestui que trust, I became once more aware of that shadowy phantom at my shoulder, while the room all around seemed to sink slowly into a sombre gloom until the very page before me appeared blurred and indistinct.

"Of course the meaning of this," I mentally determined, when for the tenth time or so I had convinced myself that there was nothing unusual behind me and that the lamps were burning just as brilliantly as ever, "is that I am going to sleep, and that if it wasn't for this waking nightmare which stirs me up every now and then, I should doze off over Tompkins and sleep away the greater part of the evening. This will never do. It is evidently too soon after dinner to attempt to read, I had better go out,"

I took my own advice with the utmost docility. There was a very popular ballet performing at a well-known house of entertainment. I went in for an hour or so and afterwards looked in at a club. When I returned home I found the fire out, a polar climate pervading the room, and the wood-bin empty. Exceedingly angry, I invoked maledictions on Mrs. Hopkins forgetful memory, and resolved to get a servant of my own as soon as possible.

I passed an exceedingly disagreeable night, in which the illusion of the evening was repeated with the grotesque extravagance peculiar to nightmare. I dreamt that I was pursued by an enormous shadowy figure, which I could not see, but which I knew was following me with evil intention. I fled through miles and miles of the gloomiest caverns with the greatest

velocity, and with a dreadful feeling that if I stopped for a moment the pursuer would overtake me. How long the nightmare lasted I am unable to say, but when I awoke at last I was covered with cold drops and it was broad day.

I saw my neighbour in the afternoon. He had been in the Courts and was returning to deposit his wig and gown. We talked a little about a case of great interest in which he was retained, and then at last he said, quite abruptly, with a peculiar look :

"You know what I am dying to ask you?"

"Indeed, I do not," I replied in astonishment, both at the question and his manner.

"Well, then—hang it all—have you seen anything?"

"*Seen* anything?"

"Yes."

"I don't quite comprehend," I replied, with an uneasy speculation whether my neighbour was liable to fits of mental derangement.

He glanced at me incredulously.

"I mean the Shadow, you know."

"I am afraid I don't know. What shadow?"

"Don't you know the story of your rooms?" Words cannot express the accent of astonishment with which he put this question.

"No—except that they have been unoccupied for a long time."

"What a ghastly swindle. Do you mean to say that you were not told that the rooms are supposed to be haunted?"

"Haunted! My dear sir! Pray forgive me, but——" and I broke into uncontrollable laughter.

"Don't mention it," he said, not in the least offended. "I am glad to hear that it is all nonsense."

"And what are the rooms supposed to be haunted by?" I inquired.

"Oh, there are all sorts of stories. The principal one is a vague yarn about a sort of shadow or darkness, which can be felt, don't you know, and puts out all the lights and fires in the most inconsiderate way. Why, Great Scott, man," he cried, with a sudden alteration of voice and demeanour, "what's the matter? I believe you have seen it after all."

Involuntarily there had flashed into my brain the memory of the strange phantasy which had beset me on the preceding evening, and close on its heels came the reflection that there really was an extraordinary difficulty in keeping the fires alight.

I communicated my experiences to my companion.

"Strange," he observed. "Yes, that is much the usual story. And they always turn round in time. But the really creepy idea is to think what might happen, *if they did not turn round.*" He had sunk his voice to a thrilling whisper which was suggestive of an infinity of horror. An eerie feeling stole over me and an icy hand seemed to clutch my spine. Then my manhood reasserted itself.

"Probably they would have gone to sleep," I said lightly.

"I don't know," he answered gravely ; "but I should be sorry to try the experiment."

By this time I was so ashamed of having, even momentarily, given way to supernatural terrors, that I was anxious to reassert myself.

"I will try the experiment," I said recklessly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I will spend this evening in the big room and that if the illusion occurs again, I will give it a chance. I will not turn round until something definite happens."

"I think you are very foolish," he replied. "I wouldn't do it after what you have told me, for a hundred pounds."

Nine o'clock that same evening found me seated in my drawing-room fully prepared to carry out my campaign, and inspired with the courage and complete confidence which springs from the absorption of an excellent dinner. A big fire was burning with a nearer approach to a blaze than I had seen as yet within that sombre grate. Three large lamps were lighted in different parts of the room. Altogether I felt, with a satisfied air, as I settled down in the armchair, that it really would require a very powerful illusion to produce the faintest semblance of gloom. I discarded Tompkins, moreover, for this evening, in favour of a two-shilling novel, which I thought would be less provocative of slumber.

The story proved to be a little too interesting. I soon became completely absorbed in it, and forgetting all about the object

of my vigil, plunged eagerly into the thick of the mystery which formed its chief ingredient. How long my attention was thus enthralled it is impossible to say, but I suddenly sprang back to consciousness in the very middle of the plot, and flung myself round in the chair with an inarticulate cry of expectation and surprise. Someone had touched me lightly on the shoulder.

Yet no human form was visible.

I gazed blankly round the room. I even got up from my chair and executed a more searching survey. I don't exactly know what my motive was. It is true that that idiot Jack Bulteel was fond of foolish jokes, but still——

Then I remembered the story which I had been told in the afternoon, and a faint wave of cold fled through my veins at the remembrance. Was it possible that——

“Nonsense!” I cried aloud. “Ridiculous! It *must* have been pure imagination.”

I drew a chair up to the fire and sat down with my feet on the fender. The inclination to read had passed away. I remained gazing vacantly into the red depths of the grate.

Very soon I became conscious that though my feet were toasting there was a curious sensation of cold attacking the region of the back. I shivered slightly and stirred up the fire, drawing nearer to get the full effect of the blaze. A vague idea made itself faintly visible that the cold was unaccountable, that the walls were falling strangely into shadow, that——

Again that light touch on my shoulder.

I sprang to my feet with a cry of fury which changed at once to surprise, not unmingled with fear.

The room was black before me, black with a vague floating shadowy mist, through which the lamps shone with the palest radiance, as if the light were stifled and choked by the darkness. Even at that moment one of them flickered feebly and went out. The rest would soon follow its example.

Petrified with amazement, I stood gazing at the strange sight, while the cold drops gathered on my brow.

Then a blast of chill, noisome, horrible vapour swept towards me like the foul breath of some dreadful charnel and sent an icy thrill of horror shuddering through my frame, stiffening the roots of my hair. I retired a step or two so hastily that my heel

struck against the fender. Then the second lamp went out. Darker and darker grew the room, and out of the very midst of the darkness it seemed to my terrified imagination as if a grim, shadowy figure, bearing a faint resemblance to a human form clothed in long flowing draperies, were growing into visible reality.

The third lamp went out suddenly, as if pinched by spectral fingers. Save for the faint glimmer of the dying embers of the fire the room was in thick darkness.

Fear came strongly upon me and with a wild yell, I fled precipitately ; nor did I stop my headlong flight till I found myself out in the clear, frosty air, under the stars of the midnight sky.

What is the explanation you will ask, in tones of shrill incredulity. There is none. The rooms had been so long unoccupied that only the legend remained ; its origin was completely lost.

I had the rooms dismantled throughout, without making any discovery. One of the workmen, who took down the panelling, said that the backs of some of the boards were studded with ornamental nails, almost as if they had once served as coffin-lids, but this was pure conjecture.

The rooms are closed and empty, and the Shadow once more reigns undisturbed. The thought haunts me at times unanswered. What is done there in the silence night after night, when men are asleep ? It is enough to make the blood run cold to think of it.

## “To the Unknown God.”

IT was late on a cold, still night, when resting my tired head on my arms, in my small, dull, student room, I gave myself up to a despairing recognition of the inability of man to attain to knowledge which might serve as a reward for his years of labour.

To toil as I had toiled, grudging nothing, holding back nothing, from earliest boyhood, until I stood now, the lines of care on my worn forehead, in my search after the facts that govern and lie beyond this material life. The Truth is to be won, I had said long years ago. It lies beyond the reach of the careless, that is all—but it is to be won by those who seek.

And to seek, one must climb steadfastly and high. Slowly and painfully, from those far-off years, I had been toiling laboriously up the lofty Tower of Knowledge; when I should reach the top—now and again I would pause to think—I should *know* where now I only guessed. The steps had been slow and wearisome, they had taken a lifetime to accomplish, and now, when at length the summit was obtained, instead of the great height which should command the secrets of the universe, I had reached but a narrow outlook, whence I could only discern a few, so it seemed to me, unimportant facts, that had been overlooked by the less observing—facts scarcely worth the sacrifice of a lifetime—as I recognised the vast veiled spheres that lay beyond, governed by the laws I could not comprehend, and yet that in a vain attempt to comprehend, I had bartered my life.

And the foundations of those weary steps I had climbed had been the faiths of my childhood.

To-night I think my tired spirit would have rejoiced to see even the shadow of the hand of God resting on His sleeping world.

The air was growing fresher, the freshness of a southern evening, when the sun has sunk; it was a relief to my wearied brain to feel its coolness on my burning forehead. I was standing under the vast dark tent of a summer night, that awaited yet an unrisen moon; numberless stars lit with their vague, far-

off fires, the smoothly swelling sea, towards which my eyes were turned, the sharply defined coast line, which was strangely familiar. Well I knew this hill on which my feet rested, whence could be seen, blazing far around, the glow of the altar fires. I knew, before I stooped my head to read, the inscription, roughly carved on the stone by which I stood; yes, even by the cold light of the stars, it stood out clearly enough: "To the Unknown God." My feet had found the bourne which my spirit had already falteringly reached, but, recognising it, my feet turned back at once, even as my spirit had arrogantly done before.

"Sir." A soft voice arrested me before I had taken more than a step away. I turned; a tall, veiled woman stood near by, her outline cut dark against the dark night. So closely veiled that my eyes were only dimly conscious of classic grace of form, the rich curves of beautiful young womanhood, while some sorrowful tone in the vibrating voice bespoke unutterable grief.

"Sir." Seeing me pause she spoke again. "You are the Priest of this neglected altar. I pray you turn not away. Instead, light fires upon it, and such gold as is mine to give shall be yours to enhance the richness of the flames—and then call down the God!"

"Alas, poor worshipper, my heart throbs in sympathy with the pain which echoes in your voice, but here there is no help for you, or for any one. Speak to me, if human aid can aught avail."

"Ah, Sir," the words were a cry of pain, "there is no human aid in all this wide world that can soften or help such woe as mine!"

"Then it were well to seek the gods whose altar fires gleam all around; fires lit by faith, tended and kept alive in love and worship. The priests are there to buy the peace that you, it seems, would rejoice to purchase."

"Alas, there is no altar where I may hope to purchase peace. Herè would bid me seek it in wifehood and chaste maternal joys; Apollo bid me turn to art, and in music find relief. But there are some whose hearts are sealed to love, moments that no music, however divine, can soothe, and those moments press hard upon me."

"Who are you? Tell me your name, and the grief you mourn."

The shadowy veil was pushed aside; out of the shrouding folds two dark eyes, under their straight barred brows, met mine; brows black as the solemn night, black as the hair that waved on the low forehead. "I am Aglaë—last night the favoured slave of Hilarion."

"A favoured slave," I said, and I heard my voice grow cold, "must buy her peace at costly rate. Athene's is the temple to which I would counsel you to take your gold and tears."

"Ah, you mistake! Athene's self is not more chaste, more pure than Aglaë, the slave of Hilarion. You are a stranger here or you would know the little tale that hangs about her name. Why every one in Athens has heard of how Hilarion, wandering through the market, saw there a little foreign child, dancing, while tears ran down her cheeks, striving to raise a voice in song, which trembled with fear and hunger. Of how he stopped, and, touched with pity, bought the little maid and took her home, no longer weeping, but clasping his hand in confidence and peace. Of how, on his return, he knelt and gave her to his mother (then newly widowed), who treasured the child for his sake whose was the gift. Why every one in Athens knows that old tale!

"I am she who stood by Hilarion's side that summer morn and heard him say: 'Mother, guard well this lovely maid, and she will grow one day to reward your care,' then smiled at me and won, with that smile, my childish heart, which hath known since—can never know—another love."

She ceased. I saw the slender hands pressed close together, as if to still the pain which echoed in the voice, then looked at me from out the hollowed eyes. It seemed she grew even whiter as she spoke.

"Ah, sir, the child who danced when she was sad, and sang when she was tired, and cold and hungry, could ne'er forget the man who stooped and saved her from such a fate."

"You owe a debt," some cold voice said—was it mine?—"and it is so commanded, that in this world all debts must be paid. When they fall due, is as Fate decrees."

"Mine has been paid." In the soft voice there rang a note of pride. "He gave me life—I gave him back his own! Ask any

citizen, and he will tell you how, one summer day, Hilarion stood without, careless of what might chance, careless of warning voices which cried, 'Take heed! Take heed!' Until the dog, maddened with thirst and sun, was within one bound of him, and of how, even then, he turned and, noting me, cried, 'Aglaë have a care; the dog is mad!'

"But it was not backwards, at his warning cry, I sprang; the one step I took, placed me between the two. The fatal spring took me for victim, not the man who once had saved my life. Upon my arms show still the marks of savage bites, which in my gratitude I heeded not. His was the helping hand that led me helpless back, his was the voice that first of all reached my dulled ears and gained my wandering brain.

"Our well-loved Aglaë, oh mother mine, has stepped unfearing 'twixt grim death and me; we must not unappreciative prove, oh mother loved, of such quick wit and tender courage.'

"If she recover,' I heard the mother say, 'nothing there is too great to offer. With you shall rest the decision of award.'

"And when, weeks later, faint and white and worn, I stood at length, a shadow of my former self, Hilarion smiled, and said, 'Live, Aglaë, and by the gods I swear that the night I bring my bride across the threshold of my home, that night I give you freedom.'

"To-night," she paused, and stretched a slender arm towards where below a thousand twinkling lights reflected the glow of Heaven, "to-night Hilarion brings his bride across the threshold of his home! This morning, ere he sought her, he came to me and said, 'Aglaë, I do not forget; at the great height of happiness and love which I have now attained, I do not forget her to whom I owe them both, in owing life.' These golden bracelets on my arms, this golden chain about my neck, are symbols of the freedom which is mine, given by him this fatal day that I had foreseen and feared so long. He clasped them on my wrists and round my neck, and as he did so, 'Last night a slave, a favoured slave,' he said; 'to-day, won by the courage and strength which I admire, you stand as free as does my mother—or my wife.' I stand as free, 'twas truth he spoke—all that man can, to set me free, he did, but with the freedom—broke my heart!"

Again she paused, and then, "There is no God, as you can

judge, to help me in my straits—no use in all the world for all this love and pain, and so I seek yon altar, and call on you, its Priest, to pray his presence, whom the darkness hides. Kindle the fire, call down this Unknown God, faith may command a hearing !”

And at her words, or, as it seemed, at something in voice and attitude, I was compelled to lean towards the altar, and as I did so, up through the clear, still darkness rose, straight as a sword, a parting flame of fire.

“Now, take my gold,” and on to the blaze I cast those glittering links she held towards me. I saw them melt, and, in a thin molten stream, gleam in the darkening night. Then through the silence I heard the woman cry, “Call on this Unknown God ! All other gods are vain ; there is no comfort anywhere for such as I. I seek a God who needs this useless pain—this useless pain, which yet has broken my heart !”

In the bright light, which now shone from the altar wide around, I saw her lying prone upon the earth—the thin gold stream had almost reached her shrouding veil.

“This world has no help, or need, for pain like mine,” I heard her sigh. “The other gods can only offer forgetfulness or vague, unreal relief. He, whom I seek, is one to whom this pain would be a welcome gift, because He would know aright its cost.”

There was no word that I could say—it seemed that I was dumb—and yet I knew there was an answer I could give, if only I could speak, but I was dumb, and down below the lights flickered and flamed, rejoicing signs, where Hilarion had taken home his wife, while here where I stood, the thin gold stream still flowed towards where rested the prone head of her who had spoken, and the flames upon the altar sprang up high into the canopy which stretched clearly dark above our heads.

“Aglaë,” I had turned towards where she lay, was leaning now above her, “listen.”

Ah, there *was* something I could say even to such anguish and despair as this—if I could remember, but, alas ! my mind was a blank, even as my tongue was dumb.

“Call on your god,” I heard her say again. “The unknown may hold the help I need.”

I knelt beside her, and took her slender hand in mine—the golden stream had almost reached her now. The rich red stream

shone through the dark night, as well it might, rich in purest gold, gift from a woman's broken heart.

"Help," some such cry passed my lips, wandering vaguely out into the night, directed no whither, born only of my sorrowing human sympathy, but as I breathed the word, there came some answer, vague as the cry itself.

The hand that held my own relaxed its clasp, the sad eyes were closed, some shadow of peace veiled the grief-struck face. She was lying now quite still, with some faint smile upon her lips, that surely had not been there a moment past. It was only when I leant nearer, bent close above her, that I perceived all was in truth at peace—that the agonized heart had ceased to beat. In answer to the call, the Unknown God had come.

The flames burnt down, the golden stream had ceased to flow, the lights that glittered about Hilarion's home had faded into indistinctness, even the dark star-decked canopy had lifted slowly. I was leaning once again, tired and worn and aged, in my small, overcrowded student room, but somehow it seemed that I was no longer looking over a vast black void, breathing hopelessness and despair ; it was rather as if I had faintly and vaguely caught a glimpse of the shadow of the Hand of God resting on His sleeping world.

## Through the Multitude of Business.

### CHAPTER I.

"MEN are powerless to charm me," laughed Muriel Adeane. "I have been engaged to two, and I don't know which bored me most."

"And now?"

"Now I am free—thank Heaven!"

Miss Adeane was tall and handsome, with a rich olive skin, and eyes which were naturally bright and sparkling. A rather cruel little smile flickered round her mouth as she tore the leaves of a lily with restless fingers. Undoubtedly she was a splendid creature—a genuine "daughter of the gods"—but all too cold in her regal beauty, and so thought the man at her side.

"Your flower!" she said, throwing it aside. "Flowers are dangerous things. They sometimes give away our secrets."

"We have no secrets to betray—you and I."

"Speak for yourself, Courtenay," she retorted. "I have no belief in your powers. You mesmerize poor fools who are weak enough to submit. *You* read thoughts! who could not look into my heart, or see one inch below the surface if you died for it. *You* have great influence over women! But I—I am not a woman."

"What then?"

"God knows! Half a sinner, and a little bit of an angel. I have never sued for forgiveness, and yet in the eyes of some I am higher than the stars."

"You do not believe I could curb your will—make you my slave—if I would."

"If you would!" she laughed. "What man would not? It is impossible, dear friend. So spare yourself the fruitless task of trying, and the still more aggravating fact of having failed."

"You know," he cried, "the intoxicating joy of success. To utter the very word 'failure' is like touching the sharp edge of a knife. 'Excess' is my motto. 'Success' my king."

"You are a strange man," she murmured softly, "and if you

had not sworn to conquer me, I might almost like you. Ernest Mitchell repeated your words at the club—told me about your bet. Your friends say you cannot win me in one month, and that I am going to marry Earl Pembroke—or his money—so I hear.”

“ Mitchell is a babbling cur ! Why do you listen to him ? ”

“ I don’t listen. He talks to me, and sometimes I overhear. He has a sharp penetrating voice that hurts my head.”

“ It is twelve o’clock,” he said, pointing to the time. “ The first of the month.”

The music, alluring and soft, stole from the ball-room, and wailed among the palms. Neither moved.

“ Do you see that woman in the long black gown ? ” asked Muriel Adeane.

“ The girl with hazel hair, and a very white forehead ? ”

“ Yes, she is beautiful. Her jewels are finer than mine.”

“ What of that ? ”

“ Look ! ” pointing to the retreating figure. “ How she is laughing ! Her husband cut his throat at dinner, and they say she gets drunk every night.”

“ Grief is devoured in flame,” he replies. “ God made women weak.”

“ Finish the sentence. He trusted their defence to man’s generosity.”

“ I will be generous, if you will be weak ! ”

Miss Adeane drew her skirts aside, with a deprecating gesture.

“ What quaint witchcraft you practise ! It is so obscurely veiled one cannot feel even a little fluttered or confused. Poor Courtenay ! ”

He looked straight into her eyes—so straight that she almost thought he had struck her. A strange stunned feeling surged through her brain, and for the moment she was robbed of sight and sense. With a sudden inward fear she sprang to her feet, and then she laughed, a soft, rippling peal, which broke from her lips to smother a cry.

“ It is quite light outside,” she said, turning to the window. “ Why ! The day has dawned ! ”

They glanced up and saw that the clock had stopped. It was still twelve.

"Let us go," said Muriel.

She led the way to the hall. The music was silent, and though a few stray guests still lingered, the dance was over. Her chaperone stood cloaked in the doorway, awaiting her charge.

Miss Adeane took in the situation at a glance.

"I feel honoured," whispered a voice in her ear, "that I have been able to detain you so long. It shows me I found favour after all." Again his piercing eyes were riveted upon her—and they seemed to burn and burn. "I am glad—most glad," he continued. "Have you not one word for me at parting?"

"You are cruel," she replied. "I think you are the sort of man who would ill-treat his animals."

All that night Muriel could not sleep. She told herself it was over fatigue, and was horrified at the dark lines beneath her eyes in the morning.

"I will ride," she said. "There is nothing so refreshing as a good gallop."

She started out, turning her horse's head towards the Row—then hesitated. Some intuition warned her not to go. She seldom believed in presentiments, but this one startled her. A desperate longing to get out of town made her decide on Richmond Park as the best place for a canter, and the thought became more delightful as she rode on. "Richmond Park!" These two words rang in her ears. She longed for a sight of the deer and the shady trees, the large expanse of soft green turf. Faster she urged her steed—away from the city of London to sweeter, purer air. As her horse passed through the gates into the grass beyond, another rider came in sight. At first Muriel did not recognise him, but as he approached a vague dread crept over her, and a second later Courtenay Somerville was at her side.

"I thought you would come," he said excitedly. "I knew it!"

"Don't talk so loudly, or my groom will hear. I never meant to meet *you*."

A flush of anger spread its tell-tale crimson over her cheek, and then left it paler than before.

"I willed it," he whispered mysteriously. "I made you come. It was to prove my power!"

She laughed scornfully, turning her mocking eyes upon him.

"By all means fulfil your engagement, as I can quite well receive him alone."

"I shall not be absent long, my dear."

"Oh! do not hurry on my account. I have frequently entertained a host of visitors, while you were enjoying a peaceful siesta upstairs, far away through the ivory gate of dreams. Go, my good aunt, and amuse yourself. Drink a lot of tea, and talk any amount of scandal!"

"Muriel, you know I never pull my acquaintances to pieces."

"Not literally—and after all speech is our own, to use as we please. Half the flavour of conversation would vanish, if an act of Parliament should be passed to bridle tongues."

Muriel flung herself into an easy chair and picked up a book.

"Good-bye, Aunt Cicely," she said, without raising her eyes. She sat perfectly still for a long time, with the book open before her but unread, and then started suddenly. Someone was coming upstairs, and she sprang to her feet, holding her breath. Muriel expected to see Courtenay Somerville, instead of whom Henry Erskine entered the room, and she went forward to greet him with mixed feelings of disappointment and relief. He was her old and trusted solicitor—a man she had known all her life, and who took the entire management of her affairs. She consulted him in everything, and had perfect confidence in his judgment.

"I have called several times lately," he said, "in hopes of finding you alone."

"So you chose my at home day," she replied laughing.

"Unfortunately, and twice I have found you out."

"What have you to say that is so secret and important?"

Mr. Erskine looked at her steadily.

"Perhaps you will be annoyed with me for mentioning it, but I am going to give you a word of advice simply from a sense of duty and friendship."

"You mystify me."

"Well, I will come to the point at once. Miss Adeane, you have made a very undesirable acquaintance. Forgive me for blackening your friend, but you have no father—no one who could warn you against him."

"And his name?"

crept over her. She glanced up and saw his eyes glistening. 'Please do not look at me like that, I cannot stand it.'

"Own that I have a little power over you," he whispered in reply, gazing more fixedly. "Own it once and for all."

She tried to smile and rise, denying there could be any truth in his assertion. She would fain have laughed him to scorn, but no words came. Miss Adeane remained among the cushions mute, and staring in front of her as one in a trance.

"Come!" he said steadily. "You are not yourself. I will take you in."

Courtenay Somerville knew well what he had done, and felt no surprise that even before his victim staggered to her feet, she fell back helpless, while her head sank heavily upon the sofa. It was not the first time he had mesmerised a woman. For fully ten minutes he stood watching the sleeping girl, and not attempting to wake her—his ambition gratified—his conquest attained. She was white to the very lips, and hardly appeared to breathe at all. Presently he took one limp hand firmly in his, rapping her sharply on the forehead with the other. "Wake up!" he cried imperiously. "Do you hear me? Wake up!"

Muriel heaved a deep sigh, and moved her head. There was a slight stir among the silken pillows, and then she raised herself wearily, while she clung to him—trembling and weeping.

"Courtenay," she gasped, "Courtenay, don't leave me! I am so frightened."

In a moment his arms were round her, and their strong support brought comfort.

"You love me?" she murmured. "What a beautiful dream!"

"Yes," he replied, "and to-morrow, Muriel, you will marry me?"

"To-morrow!" She passed her hand over her forehead and tried to think. Then she said again—"To-morrow!"

"Your aunt will be away, and I shall fetch you during her absence in my carriage. I knew you would consent to-night, and I have made all arrangements."

She laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I know nothing now except that I love you. When the spell is broken we will talk of marriage."

The following day, as he had said, Muriel was left alone. She remembered but vaguely the events of the previous evening, till Courtenay Somerville's appearance brought them back only too vividly.

"I have come to fetch you," he said, "as I promised last night. A drive will do you good, and on the way I will tell you where we are going."

Miss Adeane did not know why, but she obeyed him like a child, and she did not realize until they were speeding through the streets that the object of their drive was without explanation.

"We are going to a registry office," he told her. "Love cannot wait. It is now or never! You must marry me to-day or not at all!"

"To-day then let it be!" she cried clasping her hands. "I would sooner die than lose you."

"I only hope your devotion is sincere!"

"Yes, I have never been denied anything. I require you above all the world."

"This is romantic. It reminds me of the dark ages. We are off to Gretna Green!"

So they talked on till the horses drew up in front of a house into which Courtenay led the way. Muriel signed her name mechanically, but her mind was a blank, and she could hardly recollect what had taken place as they passed out.

"Where are we going?" she asked, turning her flushed face to Courtenay.

"I am taking you back to your home," he replied coldly, and his voice sounded strained and hard.

She started involuntarily.

"Why?" she gasped. "And what are *you* going to do?"

"I shall go abroad to-morrow alone."

"But I do not understand. We are married!"

"Then let me explain. The whole thing has been a play! I have won my bet, and you, I hope, have learnt a lesson. You, who had broken so many hearts, dared me to try my power. Now that I have shown you the full force of that power, I am going away. The little trick that has been played will be kept as secret as the grave. Ernest Mitchell was the man who handed you the paper, and watched you sign. He disguised

himself. The others were also men I know, and they came to witness it themselves. They could hardly believe their eyes! Here is the paper. Keep it, or tear it in a thousand atoms, and fling it into the fire of forgetfulness. Ours was no marriage, and you will find there is not even any writing on the sheet where you signed your name. Imagination led you to believe there was. You were mesmerized at the time."

A cry of despair broke from Muriel's lips.

"It was wicked, cruel, and yet—yet I loved you, and I think I love you still! You *shall not* leave me! Now that you have proved to your friends I am willing to take you, it is your duty to marry me. I will not blame you, but claim you as my right."

"My dear lady," he answered softly, "such a thing is impossible. Women have no power to charm my soul, thank Heaven! I am free, and intend to remain so."

Miss Adeane leant back in the carriage and stifled a sob. Her teeth were clenched, and there was a dangerous look in her eyes.

"You were right," she muttered at last. "I *was* mesmerized. I hated you from the first, and I have always despised you in my heart. Your very touch is pollution. Your every word an insult. When we meet again, Mr. Somerville, I will repay you."

The carriage had drawn up, and she sprang from it eagerly, refusing his proffered aid. Her eyes blazed with indignation, as he bowed her a last farewell.

"*Au revoir*," she said in her low musical voice, which reached his ear, and his alone. "Not until I am equal with you will I say adieu!"

"Forewarned is forearmed," he answered, raising his hat. "Besides, revenge never satisfies. Only the ignorant practise it, and the foolhardy feel its whip."

"Then I think you will suffer!" Muriel replied slowly as she turned away.

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## CHAPTER II.

"NOTHING is bad enough for men!" said Muriel. "They do so much harm in the world. It is well to give them a rub back sometimes!"

Her aunt looked up surprised. "My dear child, I am sure *you* have no old scores to remember, and even if you had, it would be more Christian to forget them, now fate has been so good to you."

"I suppose it *is* tremendously lucky to come into a huge fortune at four-and-twenty, and to have such a sweet creature as you, Aunt Cicely, to bear with me in all my moods. Yet still I pity women! Especially those unfortunate individuals who have nothing to recommend them. I should die under the misfortune of an ugly face. When a man falls in love he can plead his own cause, but women have to wrap their unmasked affection away in aching hearts, and only too often the secret love, that descends hidden to the grave, is the best and purest that the world can give. Wasted, yet still unquenched, it burns internally, eating its way like a deadly cancer into the soul."

"Why, Muriel, one would almost think you had been crossed in love."

"What an absurd idea! No. I was talking of the whole sex, and showing you they are at a disadvantage. I have entirely left myself out of the argument, for of course I could buy a husband any day."

"You have so many friends, it would indeed be strange if amongst them you had not many admirers."

"People talk of being 'in love,' but they never name the opposite state of mind, and become 'in hate.' How odd it would be to say, 'I have fallen in hate!' Would it not?"

Mrs. Vincent smiled. She was so unoriginal herself that she considered Muriel the most entertaining companion imaginable, and hung upon her words with flattering interest.

"By the way, Aunt Cicely, do you happen to remember Mr. Somerville?"

"Yes. He has been absent a long while, we have not seen him for years. He left, I remember, rather suddenly, and I mentally added him to the list of your victims."

"He has returned to town, and I have asked him to come and see me."

"When do you expect him?"

"This very afternoon."

"I had promised to go to the Gordons' 'At Home.'"

"By all means fulfil your engagement, as I can quite well receive him alone."

"I shall not be absent long, my dear."

"Oh! do not hurry on my account. I have frequently entertained a host of visitors, while you were enjoying a peaceful siesta upstairs, far away through the ivory gate of dreams. Go, my good aunt, and amuse yourself. Drink a lot of tea, and talk any amount of scandal!"

"Muriel, you know I never pull my acquaintances to pieces."

"Not literally—and after all speech is our own, to use as we please. Half the flavour of conversation would vanish, if an act of Parliament should be passed to bridle tongues."

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"What have you to say that is so secret and important?"

Mr. Erskine looked at her steadily.

"Perhaps you will be annoyed with me for mentioning it, but I am going to give you a word of advice simply from a sense of duty and friendship."

"You mystify me."

"Well, I will come to the point at once. Miss Adeane, you have made a very undesirable acquaintance. Forgive me for blackening your friend, but you have no father—no one who could warn you against him."

"And his name?"

"Mervyn Dalbiac, one of the cleverest swindlers of the day. He has initiated himself into your good graces, because you are rich. His trade is a very simple one. He will probably lead you to believe he is a great financier, and offer to treble your fortune in a couple of months. He will do you out of thousands if you fall into his trap. Don't listen to his schemes, and steer clear of the money market. He has been the ruin of numerous unwary speculators, and is on the hunt for more. It is his business. I am speaking plainly, for it is my privilege to warn you, as I consider him one of the greatest blackguards in the city. I was perfectly horrified when I met him at your house."

"You astonish me! I have always looked upon Mr. Dalbiac as a most harmless individual. But do you really think so badly of him?"

"Indeed, I was never more in earnest in my life. Your interests, Miss Adeane, concern me, and in this case I am absolutely certain caution is necessary."

"Then let me thank you heartily for your valuable advice. I know you are the truest friend I have in the world."

"You will not pin your faith to him if he spreads the most tempting nets, and opens gold mines at your feet?"

"No. When he commences a great harangue on finance, I shall know what to expect."

"Now I have unburdened my mind, I must leave you, for my time is precious, and forgive this very fleeting visit, as well as the advice you have taken so kindly."

"It is most kind of you to spare me even two minutes of your valuable day."

As Henry Erskine left her, Courtenay Somerville was announced. Muriel welcomed him cordially, extending her hand with a smile of welcome.

"You are quite a stranger," she said, sweetly.

"Yes, and I trust you will regard me as such, for strangers may grow into friends, that is, if you can forgive and forget the past?"

She laughed coquettishly. "It may seem strange that I should wish to see you after our parting, but I am years older now, and I hope a little wiser. I thought I knew the world then, when I tempted you to prove your power. We cease

playing with fire when our fingers get burnt! You taught me my mistake, yet I do not blame you. It was humiliating at the time, but believe me, I have swept it from my mind like a dream of the night."

"I hardly dared to hope for so much kindness."

"Do you know I quite enjoy discussing old times?"

"I think the new ones are still more interesting."

"Perhaps, but I have so much to occupy me now, since a turn of fortune's wheel made me one of the richest women in England."

"And you still live with your aunt?"

"Oh, yes! She is a sort of niece to me. We—the orphan and the widow—both feel sadly destitute of family ties."

"Yet half the world might envy you!"

"Men, doubtless, covet my money, and I can feel with them, for I was not always rich. They would sacrifice everything to the golden calf when the fever is once on them. Like Judas, they touch the accursed coin, and give up their lives to buying, selling, and getting gain; and when the end comes——"

"Do not talk of that," interrupted Courtenay. "Live in the present, die in the present, and leave the 'after' vague."

Muriel sighed. He drew his chair closer and leant forward.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to be with you again. You will never know the remorse I have suffered, nor how bitterly I regret the past. I believe I was possessed of a devil!"

"Very likely, there are plenty of them about."

"Oh, please do not laugh!"

"Why?"

"I cannot bear to see others cheerful when I am sad," he muttered with downcast eyes.

"As selfish as ever!"

He glanced up and saw the calm, sweet look return to her face, that look which only dwelt there in her happiest moments, and though she spoke jestingly, there was sympathy in her eyes.

"What a fool I was once!" he thought, grinding his teeth.

"Why are you unhappy?"

"The world has been treating me badly. While it has given you everything, it has left me practically destitute."

"You have spent your substance on riotous living, and now you are grinding the husks?"

"You jump at conclusions. I was relying on an uncle who is the head of a large firm in the city, to start me in business. However, he has just married a widow with four sons all over six feet, and will do nothing for me."

"How very unfortunate; but why despair? there is a 'multitude of business.'"

"Not for men like me."

"Why?"

"I have no capital."

"I am glad you told me, for it is terrible to be cramped for the sake of a helping hand. If ever it is in my power, I will show you there are still such things as true forgiveness, and undying friendship lingering in this dark world."

Before he had time to thank her, their *solitude à deux* was interrupted by Mrs. Vincent's return, and the conversation drifted to general topics, only occasionally his eyes met hers, in a swift glance of mutual confidence.

"Will you dine with us to-morrow?" Muriel said, as he rose to go. "Mervyn Dalbiac is coming, and I should like you to meet him."

Courtenay gladly accepted. His hopes ran high, and the prize he had once so scornfully discarded, now offered the only way of escape from the cramping clasp of poverty.

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### CHAPTER III.

AFTER their first meeting, Miss Adeane frequently entertained Mervyn Dalbiac and Courtenay Somerville. They struck up a friendship that she encouraged in every possible way, and while Courtenay's visits occurred daily, Mr. Dalbiac's became more numerous and lengthy than of yore.

"You are not looking well," the latter told her one day, as they were sitting together in her boudoir. "You have been shutting yourself up, and losing your interest in society."

"Yes, it is early days to grow tired of pleasure, but the fact is, I am heartily sick of a perpetual round of gaiety."

"It is quite strange to hear you talk so seriously."

"Oh! I am not such a frivolous being as you imagine, Mr.

Dalbiac, I can be sensible sometimes. Men sneer at our sex, and think us empty and light-headed. If they would treat us as their equals, they might find out what we really are."

"But women cannot share our graver interests. Look at business, for instance, they do not understand——"

"There you are wrong! I, for one, take the keenest interest in finance. I have often longed to talk to you on the subject."

Mr. Dalbiac's eyes glistened. "It is my daily occupation to increase the fortunes of others," he said. "Everything I touch turns to gold."

"That is because you are so clever. Oh, it is wonderful to be such a great financier. There is nothing in the world I admire more in a man."

"Miss Adeane, I am delighted to hear you speak so, as I am deeply absorbed at present in a scheme which is practically bound to succeed. It will prove a trump card for all concerned, a master-stroke of business!"

"I should like to hear about it, if it is anything in which I could buy a share. I have promised to help Courtenay Somerville, who is a very old and dear friend of mine, and should this prove anything in which I could interest him, and if by its means I could help him to amass a fortune on his own account, I would gladly supply the capital. You understand?"

"Perfectly. You were always generous!"

"He is really in straitened circumstances, and for a man of his social standing it is utter beggary. I cannot bear to think of the penury some endure, while their moneyed friends continue to live on the fat of the land, without raising a finger to help them. Friends indeed! That is not my idea of friendship!"

"What noble sentiments!" ejaculated Mr. Dalbiac, raising his eyes.

"Now if you will tell me your scheme," said Muriel, "I will give you my undivided attention."

"Candidly I do not think you will be disappointed. I myself am infatuated with the idea. A friend of mine has discovered a wonderful application of electricity, which will revolutionize the present lighting system. The electric light is acknowledged to be the very best, the only drawback being its costliness. Under his invention, the cost will be reduced to a minimum, and the

benefit of it placed in the hands of the million. The profits are quite incalculable, and the only thing wanted now to produce it on a scale to show its practicability is capital."

He spoke excitedly, and Miss Adeane seemed to have caught his ardour, her eyes brightened, she bent forward involuntarily.

"Go on—I am listening."

Mr. Dalbiac, encouraged by her interest, broached the most important subject.

"If you feel inclined to find this capital," he said, "I will enter more fully into details."

Muriel replied she had already told him so.

"But," she added, "I must confess my knowledge of business matters is limited. I cannot gauge what amount would be required."

"As you entertain the proposal, I will evolve my plans. The process is simplicity itself. The only marvel is that it should have remained so long overlooked by more scientific electricians. Under the present system the electricity is produced by a motor, and through a process which I need not describe, makes a wire enclosed in a glass vacuum in a state of incandescence, which gives the light. The amount of electricity consumed is very great, and hence its heavy cost. Now my friend has discovered that by filling this vacuum with a certain species of gas, and by passing a very slight current, which can be procured from a small battery, this gas becomes highly illuminated, and gives out many times the light of the present incandescent burner at a nominal cost. Now picture to yourself for a moment, a light that must supersede every other, costing a hundredth part of the best at present known. Think what it would be in your own house—no gas bills, no electric light bills, and your lighting rates reduced to the vanishing point! It would be the greatest boon of modern times! Its brilliancy is dazzling—bewildering. It would flood our streets, our houses, our theatres, with a wealth obtained by no other artificial means. We should rise as it were from a chaos of darkness, and bless the man whose fertile brain had organized so marvellous a public benefit!"

Mr. Dalbiac spoke quickly, without pausing. He continued his subject in a lower tone, however, and there was a touch of regret in his voice.

"I have only one feeling of hesitation, Miss Adeane," he

said thoughtfully, "and that is pity for the unfortunate shareholders in gas and electric light companies. It is, alas! a terrible look-out for them! But, after all, we cannot prevent their downfall. The few must suffer for the many—the individual for the nation. It can be kept for an after consideration whether, out of the millions which must flow into our pockets, we should set apart a sum for their relief. Prosperity should not permit us to neglect the duty we owe to the poverty-stricken people—ruined through our success."

"How charitable you are!" said Muriel softly. "Very few men would have such a thought in the midst of their own triumph. I decidedly favour your praiseworthy suggestion."

Then she went into the question of how much capital would be required to rake in these millions, hardly suppressing her inclination to ask him whether they might not eventually immortalise their names by paying off the National Debt. The amount seemed startlingly small,—only £10,000 cash, and £10,000 in shares of a syndicate company of £20,000—of which she was to provide the money.

"I will readily assent to that," said Miss Adeane, upon hearing the sum, "on two conditions."

Mr. Dalbiac could hardly conceal his surprise. Why had he not trebled the figure? Suppressing his vexation, he said simply:

"What are your conditions, Miss Adeane?"

"First, that Mr. Somerville looks thoroughly into the matter and advises me upon it. Secondly, that the prospectus be advertised once in one daily paper, so that I may feel the public have had a chance of participating to some small extent in this El Dorado."

Muriel's reply staggered Mr. Dalbiac. For a moment there was a pause, and she noticed a dark shadow flit across his face. Then he broke into a tirade upon the ingratitude of the public, and the waste of their future profits for a mere sentiment. But Miss Adeane stuck to her point, asking, as she silenced his objections, how much of the capital she was to be allowed to take.

"The whole of the cash capital," he replied. "£10,000."

A few details as to how this sum was to be disposed of, had to be gone into, and the form of the prospectus to be considered.

Who looked into the contracts for you, to see if they were properly drawn?"

Somerville hesitated, and began to feel rather a fool. "I—well, to tell you the truth, I never saw a contract."

His friend grew suddenly grave, and told him he had acted most rashly. Jack Percival could put a case clearly, and showed him his mistake in such a new and unpleasant light, that he became thoroughly alarmed. The folly of his implicit faith in Dalbiac presented itself to his mind in a painfully aggravating manner, till he worked himself into a perfect fever of apprehension.

"I have no doubt it is all right, old fellow," said Jack, consolingly. "Don't worry over it to-night, but these things have a nasty way of tricking one sometimes, and of turning out in a confoundedly awkward way."

"I have an appointment with Dalbiac to-morrow in the city. Will you come with me and look into the matter? I shall not rest till my doubts are dispelled. You have made me most horribly uncomfortable."

After asking some further particulars of the company, Jack readily agreed to accompany him.

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Miss Adeane was lounging in the luxurious apartment she called her sanctum. The day was hot and depressing, and she had fallen half asleep over a novel. Every luxury conducive to ease and comfort met her eyes as she raised them drowsily, and let them wander round. Numerous quaint and grotesque embellishments caught her gaze at every turn, and each detail of wealth and splendour gave her a delicious sense of satisfaction. She looked dreamily at the velvet tapestries, and costly decorations, and from them to the paintings, the flowers and the sculpture.

Courtenay Somerville broke in upon her reverie, and she rose to greet him with her ready smile. His hand as she took it was deathly cold.

"I am in great trouble," he said tremulously. "Something very terrible has happened."

Muriel showed no sign of surprise.

"Dalbiac has disappeared," he continued, while his voice sounded hollow. "I have been duped and fooled! Percival first

the "World's Lighting Revolution." When the matter had been thoroughly explained to Somerville, the prospectus was placed before him for his approval. Mr. Dalbiac drew his attention to a brilliant light in the office, and proceeded in a most bewildering and voluminous manner to describe its action. Having done so, he handed him a letter for his signature, addressed to Mark Snewleigh—the wording being as follows:

"Sir,—I agree to accept a seat on the Board of the 'Gazelectro Lighting Syndicate,' having thoroughly satisfied myself of its practicability and adaptability. I have also satisfied myself that the cost per candle power is not more than one-tenth of that of any known light. It must, therefore, unquestionably revolutionize the lighting of the civilized world."

As Courtenay ran his eye over the document, his face assumed a puzzled expression, and he read it twice before speaking, the second time more carefully than the first. Then he laid it down, and remarked in tones denoting surprise:

"But how can I sign such a letter, when I don't know the facts to which I am certifying?"

"I can satisfy you at once," replied Mr. Dalbiac promptly, and proceeded to describe, in a technical and very confusing manner, batteries, currents, gases, vacuums, candle power, etc., till Somerville felt undecided as to whether he knew all or nothing about the subject in question. In his indecision Dalbiac fired his big gun, and made a bull's eye. "I omitted to tell you," he said, with his bland smile, "that the vendor here, who is being paid partly in cash for his invention, recognises the fact of the enormous value to him of your knowledge in business matters, and wishes you to accept one-fourth of the money for your services."

Somerville never did a sum quicker in his head, and the words were hardly out of Dalbiac's mouth before he had realized that one fourth of £9,000 was £2,250. The temptation was too great! He persuaded himself it must be right, since he had Dalbiac's word for it. Of course Miss Adeane merely requested his opinion out of compliment, and there could be little doubt the thing was perfectly genuine. Thus he argued with his conscience, Mr. Dalbiac urging him the while, till finally his

irresolution turned to decision. He came to the conclusion that the letter was concise enough, and signed his name in full.

"The Board of Directors," said Mr. Dalbiac, "will consist of you, the inventor, and myself."

Courtenay looked furtively towards Mark Snewleigh, who had been silent throughout. He appeared utterly incapable of revolutionizing anything, and merely assented, somewhat nervously, when referred to by Mr. Dalbiac.

"These clever people appear to have very little to say for themselves," thought Somerville wonderingly.

"We can have a larger board if you wish it," continued Dalbiac hastily, "but, if you will give the time and work, I think it would be a pity to reduce the fees by further division. The emolument for the board I propose should be £500 a year. You, as chairman, taking £300, and the vendor dividing the remainder with me. Besides this, it should be arranged for a percentage of the profits to come to the board, which would bring you in a very handsome income."

As Somerville's mind imbibed all this, the sudden overwhelming good fortune seemed too wonderful to be true.

He announced his intention, on parting with Dalbiac, of going at once to see Miss Adeane.

"You can tell her exactly how matters stand, Somerville," he said, "for she is a thorough business woman, and has a wonderful head. She takes a thing in directly, and is quite astoundingly sharp."

Courtenay detained Miss Adeane's little gloved hand longer than usual upon meeting her in the hall.

"I was starting for a drive," she said.

"I have come to thank you most heartily," he murmured, "for all you are about to do for me. I cannot express my gratitude—I should be thanking you every moment of the day."

He spoke so earnestly, that for a moment her heart stood still. She then turned away from him with a shudder.

"For God's sake don't thank me! I *detest* being thanked. I would rather you never mentioned the matter again. I do not want gratitude, for to me it is of all things the most hateful."

Her harsh tone jarred on his feelings, and her retort confused him. She noticed his discomfort, and tried to make amends, while her voice became pleading and persuasive.

"You won't thank me any more?" she said, and her eyes were so grave that it gave her whole face a mournful expression. "It is the one thing I ask you in return."

He bent his head in assent.

"Mr. Dalbiac is a great financier," she said, changing the subject, "I have perfect confidence in all he does. You may safely rely on his judgment, and be guided by him in everything, as there is no doubt he is an exceptionally clever man. Here is Aunt Cicely. You will come with us?"

He appreciated her objection to being thanked, and followed her to the carriage, with a thrill of happiness quivering through his frame.

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## CHAPTER V.

GAZELECTRICITY progressed steadily, and the prospectus appeared in due course in one daily paper, Mr. Dalbiac being careful to select the least likely to bring it under public notice. Miss Adeane had a copy of the newspaper, and one of the prospectus, both of which she locked carefully away in her safe. The response from the British public was small, owing to the limited circulation of this the chosen daily. Nevertheless it came into the hands of sufficient very young men and guileless old ladies to extract from them a total of £5,000. The shares were duly allotted, and the same fate befell Miss Adeane's application for the remaining £5,000. The first payment made by the company was £2,250 to Courtenay Somerville, and the next for £6,750 to the vendor. After this Somerville was told there would be no active business to be done for some time.

One night he was dining at the Savoy with his friend Jack Percival, a young solicitor, to whom he enlarged on his good fortune.

"It is quite a new line of business for me," he said cheerfully, "the directorship of a company. I never had much of a head for that sort of thing, but this is quite sound. It has paid me already £2,250 as a start, and the joke of it is they wanted to get hold of me for my knowledge! I suppose Miss Adeane stuffed them up. Dalbiac got her to put the money into it."

"I hope you were properly advised in the first place, for it is a dangerous matter nowadays to put your name to a prospectus.

Who looked into the contracts for you, to see if they were properly drawn?"

Somerville hesitated, and began to feel rather a fool. "I—well, to tell you the truth, I never saw a contract."

His friend grew suddenly grave, and told him he had acted most rashly. Jack Percival could put a case clearly, and showed him his mistake in such a new and unpleasant light, that he became thoroughly alarmed. The folly of his implicit faith in Dalbiac presented itself to his mind in a painfully aggravating manner, till he worked himself into a perfect fever of apprehension.

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opened my eyes. We went together to find him, but he had gone and left no address. The Gazelectricity was a snare—a fraud, and I—I have been their tool. I was induced to accept a part of the purchase money, which I have spent, and have no means of replacing. The shareholders can come down on me for this, while they can prosecute me for giving a fraudulent certificate since I was a director, and receiving money as a vendor, without disclosing the fact on the prospectus. I come here to throw myself upon your mercy, Miss Adeane. To implore you of your boundless wealth to buy up all the shares in the hands of the public, and to bury the company, and so prevent my being exposed to ruin and disgrace. I know you will do this, for you sacrificed so much to help me. You could not wish your good intentions to put me in so terrible a position.”

Courtenay tried to suppress his emotion and speak calmly, but Muriel’s utter indifference only excited him the more in his overwrought condition. He had looked for the ready sympathy—the kindly pity—and he feasted his eyes hungrily upon her, as though seeking a ray of hope.

“It is all very well for you to come and tell me this,” she answered with a shrug of her shoulders, “but you looked into the matter, and certified to its accuracy upon the prospectus.”

“Fool that I was!” he broke in angrily, “to be tempted by such a bait.”

“Consequently, Mr. Somerville,” she continued, eyeing him with languid disapproval, “*you* are responsible.”

“I know it! I know it!” he replied, struggling to retain his self-command. “But I was tricked and cheated by your friend. The light was never produced by the means he represented—the means to which I was deluded into certifying. Perhaps you have not realized my position to its full extent——”

She held up her hand. “I must ask you not to worry me with details. I understand the facts as clearly as you do yourself.”

“You mean you will not raise a hand to save me?” he asked breathlessly.

“Did you consider me when you made me the butt of that cruel jest?” replied Muriel slowly, and her face flushed hotly as she spoke.

For a moment Courtenay was too dazed to answer. He could hardly grasp her meaning. His lips moved, but he said nothing.

She watched him in silence, as he clung to the back of a chair. The evil triumph of her nature flashed out in pitiless exultation, while the pent-up hatred of years blazed forth from her eyes, and a victorious, jeering laugh broke from her lips. She had conquered his influence and revelled in it.

"You have courted your torture," she said at last. "You have implanted with your own hand this desire in my heart to see you fall. I have had but one toil, one aim, one hope! To level you to the dust, as you lowered me."

Her words vibrated with cruel intensity, and it was sweet to her to see the man she hated quivering from head to foot with blanched face, while his control forsook him! To note the amazed fixity into which his features set, as he gazed at her in a mute stupor! Once he would have spoken, but she stayed him with a gesture.

"My plans were laid as deeply as was your plot to entrap me," she continued, still with the same mocking smile, "and notwithstanding your age and experience you walked as unwarily into my net, as a child comparatively. I have encircled your life with the iron bonds of retribution! Have you forgotten how you humiliated me? Remember it now! Had the past glided from your mind as a buried episode? Let it rise from its grave to see justice! You became accursed and abhorrent to me from the day when you first made me your toy, and put me to open ridicule to win a paltry bet. You thought the fury of the storm had abated! After a lapse of years you did not reckon upon a yawning gulf beneath the electric glare. Your eyes were blinded to flattery and artifice, and you thought that fortune's fingers were already in your grasp when you held my hand, and whispered words of devotion! Oh! a man can little realise that a woman may have the soul of an avenger! That she can strike him down, and break his spirit, as he would fain have broken hers. He cannot believe her heart is hard, so long as her lips smile and her voice sounds softly on his ear!"

Muriel turned her scornful eyes full upon him with haughty power and bitter irony. The disdain of the look seemed to

wither him up like a devouring flame, and involuntarily he stretched out his arms.

"For the mercy of God remember what you have brought me to," he cried—hoarse with anguish and breathless with despair. "Your vengeance condemns me to death in life! I shall be arrested unless I fly the country. Oh! how could I be so blind to your merciless scheming? In the glory of your exultation may the vileness of your sin find you out! When the ashes of an overpowering fate have hidden me for ever from your sight, may your own conscience condemn you and cheat you of your fiendish joy. Though your proud and ice-cold heart may never own regret, some bitter sadness will sigh through the memories of your youth, when you think of the man you wrecked and ruined, to satisfy a devil's craving!"

Her eyes remained with their gaze riveted upon Courtenay as he spoke. The supreme moment of her life had come! No words could move her to mercy, while the hard smile which still flickered around her lips silenced the plea that trembled on his tongue and changed it to a curse. Then Muriel, with a sudden impulse crossed the room, and in the unbroken silence rang the bell.

"We are quits," she said with pitiless self-possession. "This makes us equal. You deserve your fate. If you remember once I only said '*au revoir*'—now, Mr. Somerville, I will say adieu!"

WINIFRED GRAHAM.

# The Wishing Pool.

BY INA LEON CASSILIS.

## CHAPTER I.

“COME to the Wishing Pool, Rena ; you *must* ! everyone does,” said Connie Brandon, pulling me by the sleeve.

I was fifteen then, a school girl, spending my Christmas holidays at Brandon Hall, the house of two of my school friends, Connie and Ella Brandon. They were hearty, healthy, country girls ; I, a slim, fragile, delicate creature, born in India, and of a nervous, high-strung temperament. They called me “ Porcelain ” at school, and I was considered the beauty ; but I can honestly say, that though I liked to be good-looking—what girl does not ? vanity was not my failing. Connie had told me already about the Wishing Pool at Brandon, and though, of course, I did not actually believe in the mysterious power possessed by its waters, still I was a little frightened of proving my scepticism, especially as the pool was in the midst of a thick fir plantation which was twilight in the summer noon, and one had, as in all such tests, to be quite alone. The tradition of the pool, which dated back some three hundred years, was that you stood and looked into the dark stagnant waters, and concentrated your mind upon anything you wished for, and you would *probably* see that thing, or some indication of it, in the water. You must allow at least ten minutes of contemplation before giving up the trial, and if you saw nothing, it proved that you would not have your wish. This, of course, was a very convenient way of accounting for the failure of the pool to come up to the tradition ; but, needless to say, there were innumerable stories, most of them devoutly believed by the Brandon villagers—of the strange visions seen in those mystic waters, which had been endowed by some wizard with their miraculous powers. For example, a son of the Brandon family, being very pious, had ardently desired to be enrolled in the priesthood, and visiting The Wishing Pool, had seen the image of a huge cross in the waters ; he became a priest ; but he could have had his wish without the aid of the pool ; a young woman, of a mercenary turn, desired wealth, and beheld her own reflection, crowned with

jewels, and so on; and the stories were legion of the faces of future wives and husbands (more often the latter), looking up from the pool.

I was ashamed to confess to nervousness, so I answered Connie: "I don't mind. Come along, and I'll wish."

"Oh! but you must do it in a serious spirit," said Ella Brandon.

"She'll feel serious enough when she gets there," laughed Connie. And so I did. The pool itself, and its scenic accessories, were admirably calculated to support the tradition. You could imagine anything after being five minutes alone in this eerie place. Connie and Ella led me through the plantation to the commencement of a narrow, well-worn path, and this I was to pursue alone, until I came to the pool.

"The ground is quite safe," was Connie's parting injunction; "but don't be careless, for the water is deep enough to drown anyone. We'll wait for you on the lawn."

My heart began to beat very fast, as I pursued my way alone, but I went on bravely, and soon reached the pool.

There it lay, black and stagnant, the trees growing to the very edge, and so thickly interlaced above that only a faint gloaming light came through. Mine was hardly an *épreuve* for a delicate, sensitive girl, but school-girls were not likely to think of this. How deadly still the spot was! How dreadful that pool looked! What I felt was not fear, but a vague dread, a sense of oppression; I longed to run away, and yet there was creeping over me that strange desire to pierce into futurity which is common to humanity, but more strongly developed in such temperaments as mine.

What should I wish for? What *did* I wish for? Like most school-girls, I had romantic ideas about lovers, and my lover must be handsome; they always were in the novels I read, and indeed, to me, at that unfledged period of my life, personal beauty appeared the chief, and certainly indispensable, necessity in a husband. I suppose I took other qualifications for granted; a *very* handsome man must be good; my novels told me that, though villains were sometimes endowed with great personal attractions, the hero always outstripped them. Therefore I would wish for "a very handsome husband"! I don't know that, away from the pool, I had any really ardent wish in

this regard ; what of all things I most desired was to travel ; but that seemed a rather vague wish, and not so romantic as the other. So I clasped my hands together, and looked down steadily into the still, sombre waters at my feet.

I don't know whether I really expected to see anything. My heart was throbbing ; my whole being was in a tense state of excitement and suspense ; whatever the normal condition of my mind, I most assuredly wished then, with a sort of agony of longing, for "a very handsome husband." I was too strung up, too entirely under the weird influence of the place and its tradition, for any sense of the ludicrous in my eminently school-girl desire.

I can't say how long I stood there gazing downwards, with fixed stare and bated breath ; it was, perhaps, not more than five minutes ; it seemed to me an hour. Suddenly there flashed up from the black depths a vision ; a man's face, superbly handsome, with short curly hair of a sort of reddish gold, and moustache of the same hue, a kind of brickdust skin that looked as soft as a woman's, clear-cut features, and large, brilliant, dark eyes that looked straight into mine with a strange, passionate gaze that thrilled through me, and terrified me by something fierce and sinister under all the passion. It was but a second the vision lasted ; it flashed up and was gone ; yet I saw every trait of that remarkable countenance as clearly as if I had gazed at it for minutes. I reeled backwards, quivering from head to foot, and gasping for breath. I felt the drops of perspiration standing on my forehead. It was minutes before, terrified though I was to remain here, I had strength to creep, shuddering, away. But I could not join my friends. I went round another way, avoiding the lawn, and gained my own room, and here, in about half-an-hour, Connie and Ella came, having become alarmed at my long absence, and discovered that I had left the pool.

I had somewhat recovered myself now, but I refused to tell them, despite their frantic curiosity, what I had seen. I shrank from their "chaff," and was beginning to feel a good deal ashamed, both of the wish and of my agitation at the vision, which was, after all, easily accounted for. Was not my head stuffed full of such pictures of heroic beauty ? What more natural, therefore, than that, in my abnormal state of excitement while standing beside the pool, I should see what was nothing

more than a projection from my own brain? I did not, at fifteen, put the matter in these terms, but my conclusions came to the same thing, although I am free to confess they did not quite satisfy me. How delightful it would be, I thought, to meet with a man possessed of such beauty! but the look which had terrified me somewhat qualified this reflection; that look puzzled me too. I must have been "mixing up" the hero and the villain; the hero never had anything sinister in his face.

Connie and Ella were quite vexed by my reticence, but all their efforts at discovering my secret were in vain. I would not even tell them what I had wished for. Their only consolation was in a vague promise of telling them "some day," and in the triumphant conviction that I would be no longer sceptical, since I had "seen something" in the Wishing Pool.

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## CHAPTER II.

YEARS passed; I went back to school, and on leaving it, returned to India. Sometimes I would seek vaguely, in the streets, in ball-rooms and other assemblages, for the face I had seen that day at Brandon; but of course I never saw it, and as I grew older and more sensible, I laughed at my girlish silliness. I knew that such beauty—such rare combinations of colour—are not to be found in real life, or, if they are, once in five hundred years.

When I was twenty-one, and the memory of that face in the pool had receded into the lumber-room of my brain, I conclusively proved that the vision was only the creation of my own fancy, by marrying a man who, though good-looking, was in no way specially remarkable. Major Chenevix was a fine, noble fellow, some ten years my senior, and I loved him dearly. Perhaps there was some lack of perfect sympathy between us. He was a blunt, straightforward soldier, and my imaginative temperament sometimes craved for what it was not in his power to give me; but he was the kindest of husbands, and if I was not vividly happy, if to some extent my nature was cramped, I felt I was far more than content with my lot.

We had been married four years, when my husband obtained a long leave of absence, and we came to England. I had kept up correspondence with my school friends. Connie was now

married, and Ella engaged, but Connie and her husband were to be at Brandon at Christmas, and my husband and I were invited to join the circle. The invitation had been sent out to India in August, when my friends knew we should be coming over, so we merely put up at an hotel in London for a few days, and then proceeded straight to Brandon Hall, arriving there a week before Christmas Day.

Our welcome was most hearty, and Ella begged that so soon as I was dressed, I would go to her dressing-room; she had something to tell me. So I went, and she burst out "Oh! Rena, there's a man staying here just like the heroes of the novels we used to read at forbidden times. Robert [her *fiancé*], met him in town, where he was quite the rage. He's too handsome for anything—got that sort of red-gold hair. Why, Rena, what's the matter?"

I told her, truly enough, that I didn't know. I had dropped into a chair, but I did not feel faint and sick; it was a sensation impossible to describe that came over me. I drank the water Ella brought me, and said it was "nothing;" she was not to mind; and presently I rallied, and was able to ask her who the new comer was, and so on. Raoul Wilford was his name; he was a man of property; his mother had been a French lady of the old *noblesse*; he was a most delightful man—accomplished, fascinating; indeed, I believe if Ella had not been engaged, this handsome guest, who was unmarried, would have played havoc with her heart.

I went down to the drawing-room, filled with the most intense dread. I held my breath when the door opened. I scarcely dared lift my eyes. The next moment I saw what, in my inner consciousness, I knew I should see—the face that had looked up at me six years ago from the black waters of the Wishing Pool.

Raoul Wilford was one of a group near the fire, consisting besides of Mr. and Mrs. Brandon, Connie, my husband and Ella's *fiancé*, Robert Meredith. Mrs. Brandon came forward to meet me, kissing me warmly, and then I was greeted by Mr. Brandon, and Robert, whom I had met in India two years ago, where he came out on a holiday trip. Connie I had seen before. But during these greetings I did not once look at Mr. Wilford; it took me all my self-control to preserve an ordinary demeanour, and prepare myself for the introduction. It came.

"Rena," said Mrs. Brandon, calling my attention. Wilford was close by. "Mr. Wilford, Mrs. Chenevix."

We both bowed, of course. I glanced at him fleetingly. His face showed no recognition; how should it? What a beautiful face it was! I longed to hear him speak; surely his voice must be soft and musical. I was not mistaken. He made some commonplace remark, and his voice was sweet, clear and penetrating, the sort of voice that women love. How different from my husband's! But then came a rush of remorse. Brian's voice had never uttered an unkind word to me.

How did I get through that day? I never knew; my whole soul was in a tumult. I seemed to be wrapped round with some horrible mystery. What did it mean—what *could* it mean?—my seeing this man's face in the Wishing Pool? It was no chance likeness; there was every lineament—the wonderful red-gold hair, the brilliant dark eyes, exactly as I had seen them that day, six years ago. I shuddered at the memory of the look I had met; *that* was absent; should I ever see it? I shrank from the man because I felt the fascination of his beauty, of his manner, of everything about him; but how could I escape him? Did I even wish to do so? He took me in to dinner, and his low, soft voice—did he speak to all women in that half-caressing tone?—made all my nerves quiver with a strange sweet thrill of delight. He seemed to know by intuition the subjects I loved; and how well he talked! how perfectly in sympathy with me he seemed! He did not neglect others; he did not so lose himself in conversation with me as to call attention to us; but I always felt, even when he was not addressing me, that he was thinking of me, that he was merely bowing to the exigencies of good breeding in speaking to anyone else. In fact, I was in a dream, a feverish, restless dream, at once exquisitely happy and miserable; puzzled, questioning, seeing always—always, the black pool in the fir woods, and this face beside me, looking at me with that passionate gaze. Yet it was a false prophecy—a delusion! and all the time I did not realise either that I was happy or the reverse; my mind and heart were all chaos.

Needless to say, I had never told my husband of that experience at the Wishing Pool. How he would have laughed at me! How he would laugh now if I told him that Raoul Wilford was the man I saw! "Romantic fudge!" that was a favourite

expression of his; and mockery would be unendurable. No, I must fight my own battle unaided; there was no outside help for me.

Fight! Against what? Against Raoul Wilford's power over me! I felt it every day more and more. I could not blame him; if he made any effort to influence me, it was so subtly done that I could not detect it; the fault was my own. I had no rest or peace out of his presence—no rest or peace in it, but I was happy, vividly, gloriously happy. There awoke within me forces which Brian Chenevix had never called into even momentary life; a new existence stirred within me; a new world throbbed around me. How dull and prosaic my husband seemed in comparison with Raoul Wilford!—how commonplace, and lacking in fineness of perception. Yet I did not say these things to myself; I did not recognise my position—my danger. I was fascinated, enthralled. I should have started in horror if anyone had told me, "You are drifting into a passionate love for this stranger."

One day I found myself, for a wonder, alone. It was the day before Christmas Eve. The men were somewhere out of doors, Mrs. Brandon lying down, and Connie and Ella busy decorating the dining-room with holly. I sat by the library fire, trying to read, but I failed. I could only dream, and my dreams were all of the man who had come between me and my old contentment. A hand was laid on the door handle, and I started. The wild beating of my heart told me whose hand it was. Raoul Wilford came in, closed the door, and crossed the room to the hearth.

"What, all alone?" he said, smiling, and seating himself by my side on the sofa. There *was* something in his voice when he spoke to me that belonged to me alone; I had known it for certain these three days.

"I thought you were admiring Mr. Brandon's new carriage-horses?" I said, hardly glancing at him, and trying to speak lightly.

"No," he replied, quietly; "I was looking for you." Then, bending a little towards me, he added, "I have been looking for you for six years!"

I could not move, all the blood in my body turned to ice. I felt my face growing cold like the face of a dead woman. He put his hand on mine, and I did not stir, though the touch went

straight to my heart, with thrills of ecstasy ; his voice, low, impassioned, sounded far off, and yet I knew, with an intoxicating consciousness, that he was close to me, his breath fanned my cheek.

"I knew you," he said, "the day you came, the instant I saw you—though you were changed, but only to grow far more beautiful. *And you knew me!* Why were you not faithful to me, Rena? I have been true to you. I have wandered the world over seeking—seeking for the face of the woman who was to be my other self—my own! No face but yours could quicken my pulse by one throb. But you—you have forgotten! Did you not know that we must meet one day, and that you must love me? You cannot fight against it." His clasp tightened. "No love but mine can satisfy you; your life has been so empty, and now it is full; you have solaced yourself with a dull contentment. Now you have happiness—love that opens all Heaven to you!"

Still was I paralysed, powerless in his power, thrilled through every fibre of my being with the passion to which my own responded. His arm stole round me, he drew me to his breast—he stooped to press his lips to mine; but in that terrible moment my eyes met his. I saw the look I had seen that day—the look that veiled under passion a certain sinister triumph. With a cry to Heaven for help, I wrenched myself from his arms, and sprang to my feet. I know not what I said—bitter reproach, bitter self-condemnation—but he stood before me with white, set face, and bowed to the storm. Then—he was kneeling at my feet, imploring pardon; he would never more offend; he loved me—that was no sin; it was his fate—but I should not hear it from his lips again. My heart softened; how could it do otherwise?—for, after all, I loved him, and it seemed to me that in a sense we were both creatures of Destiny.

"Swear to me," I said, hoarsely, "that you will never try to tempt me. If I have wronged you, it was unwittingly done. How should I know! Great Heaven—how should I know!"

"I swear it!" he said, humbly. "I will leave this house as soon as I can—but to do so now, on the very eve of Christmas, might excite attention."

"Yes, yes," I said, hastily. "Let no change be made. I will trust to your honour."

He kissed my hand reverently ; but that kiss burned through to my heart. I dared not look at him again. I turned away, and sought my own room, and there I fell down prostrate ; for a time I lost my senses, and perhaps that oblivion was a mercy ; it gave my fevered, tortured brain some rest.

I had my tea sent up to my room, on the never-failing plea of headache, but I was able to join the circle at dinner, and Wilford then and throughout the evening kept loyally to his promise. His manner was irreproachable ; not a look, not even an intonation, betrayed him to me as my lover. He must have put tremendous tension on himself. But I retired early, the strain of the evening was more than I could endure for long. I had, too, to bear the reproaches of my conscience ; and yet that conscience told me that I was not to blame ; my will had never strayed from my husband. I was, as Raoul Wilford had said, fighting against Fate in resisting my love for him. Yet I resolved, as I lay awake that night, rather to kill myself than be actually false to the noble, loyal husband who loved and trusted me.

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### CHAPTER III.

IT was a green Yule this year. Christmas is seldom otherwise now, whatever it was fifty years ago. Christmas Eve broke mild and damp, with threatening of rain. I kept to my rooms most of the morning, under pretence of writing letters. I felt too utterly crushed and shattered to join the merry group below ; I was afraid of breaking down altogether, and there was to-morrow—the most trying day of all—to be gone through. I was never of what is called a robust physique, and I must reserve my strength. My husband came up once, and remarking that I looked very white, drew my head against him and kissed me fondly. I clung to him with a desperate longing to tell him all, but I dared not—no ! I dared not. He would not understand. I should seem to him a woman who, caught by a handsome face and attractive manner, had actually surrendered her heart, almost unsought, to an acquaintance of a few days ! Then, how could I betray Wilford's confidence ? I owed it to him to be silent. So I smiled, said I was all right, and easily succeeded in pacifying my husband. His perceptions were by no means subtle, and he looked upon me as a creature of "moods."

I came down to luncheon, and laughed and jested with the rest. I *felt* that Wilford saw through the mask, but no one else did.

After luncheon, Ella and Robert got away somewhere together, Connie and I sat in the library, and the men went to the billiard-room; but a little before tea Connie's husband—Mr. Saxon—joined us.

"What have you done with the others?" asked his wife.

"Oh! they went out into the grounds," he replied, "nearly an hour ago—that is Wilford and Major Chenevix did. They were talking about the Wishing Pool, so they may have gone there to wish," he added, laughing.

"But do they know the way?" asked Connie. I was glad to draw back in the shadow and be silent. The lamps were not yet lighted, we were sitting in the firelight.

"Oh! yes, Ella showed them the other day."

Connie rang the bell for tea, and just then the door opened, and Wilford came in.

"Well, have you two wished?" exclaimed Connie and her husband in a breath.

"I didn't go," he answered. "You can't go two at a time to wish, you know, and I have no special liking for eerie places——"

"I shouldn't think Major Chenevix the sort of man to go in for anything superstitious," said Mr. Saxon.

"Oh! I don't suppose he is 'wishing,'" replied Wilford, "but he wanted to go and see the pool, and I went part of the way with him—as far as the entrance to the Wishing Path—isn't that the name of it? Then I turned back. I am awfully susceptible to outward impressions, and I confess I shrank from going to that black place."

The other two laughed at him good-naturedly, but I knew why he might have a nervous dread of that particular spot.

"Then Brian will soon be in," I said to him. "Did you come straight back?"

"Yes. He can't lose his way in that plantation, you know," he added, reassuringly. "Besides, the path is right opposite to him."

Tea came in, and lights, but my husband did not appear. I became at last nervous and fidgety, and Wilford, seeing this,

suggested that inquiries should be made as to whether Major Chenevix had returned to the house. He had not ; he was nowhere to be seen. Then I grew terribly alarmed, and the others, though they tried to comfort me, shared my anxiety.

"He might have fallen into the pool!" was the thought I dared not express. At last Wilford volunteered to go, with Saxon and Robert, to search the plantation, and armed with torches they set off, I following them. I could not remain still. I was filled with horrible forebodings of disaster.

The most diligent search produced, however, no result, and then at last the dread suggestion came to drag the pool !

"It is thick grown with weeds," I heard Mr. Brandon whisper, "he might have got entangled in them !"

What a terrible Christmas Eve ! While we pursued our grim search, we heard the bells ringing out for the tidings of peace and good will !

Dragging by torchlight is a difficult process, and that night proved fruitless. Almost prostrate, I was half carried back to the hall. No one dared to speak of comfort ; the only hope was that of finding the body.

The next morning—Christmas morning—as soon as it was light, Wilford, the two other young men, and some of the men servants, went to drag the pool again. They would not let me go.

About ten o'clock Connie came to me, as I paced like a demented creature up and down my room. I knew the moment I saw her that my husband had been found.

With difficulty the body had been disentangled from the reeds which had prevented him from struggling to the surface.

He must have slipped, and fallen into the pool, or, in the deep gloom of the wood, had walked over the edge before he knew he had reached the spot.

For the next three weeks I was, happily for myself, unconscious of everything. The frightful occurrence threw me into a brain fever, and sometimes I raved wildly, sometimes lay for hours in a heavy stupor. But I lived ; would that I had not !

When I was able to understand anything, I learned that Wilford was in London, and constantly inquired after me. As to my husband, it would never be known how he had fallen. The black waters of the pool kept their own secret. How fatal to me had been that Wishing Pool !

There was no chance of my making a full recovery at Brandon, with its terrible associations. So soon as I could be moved I went to Italy with Connie and her husband, and gradually my health came back. It was evident that I had not, in my ravings, betrayed the secret that was an incessant torture to me—the secret of my love for Raoul Wilford. Connie, pressed by me, said that I sometimes talked about a “face in the pool,” but they naturally thought that referred to the dead man.

Months passed, and I travelled about from place to place, accompanied, when my kind friends had to leave me, by my servant, but as time and change of scene lessened the shock of my husband’s hideous and untimely death, and my bitter grief, my heart went back to the love that had only been, as it were, suspended—never banished; the love that seemed a wrong to the dead, and yet which, I told myself, again and again, was no sin, for I had had no power against it. Where sin came in I was able to conquer.

Of course all this time I heard nothing from Wilford, nor did I, except occasionally, hear of him. I tried to put from me the hope of seeing him—the knowledge that he would surely seek me when sufficient time had elapsed to release him from his promise.

Eighteen months after my husband’s death I, living then in Paris, received a short letter from Raoul Wilford. Might he call and see me—as a friend? His chivalrous reticence touched me deeply. I answered him, bidding him come.

When we met, I think he was calmer than I was. He was the friend only, though I knew that he loved me as passionately as ever. I went to London, and for six months the friendly footing was outwardly maintained. Wilford did not call very often; then he came more frequently, and at last one day he broke down the barrier. It was one winter afternoon—just such as when he first betrayed his passion to me, and claimed me as his by right of a mysterious destiny or affinity which joined us together. I was sitting alone by the firelight when he entered, unannounced, as he had done of late.

“Dreaming!” he said, softly, advancing—and the firelight flashed on his golden hair as he bent over my hand. He took his place by my side, keeping my hand in his. I tried to draw it away, but he held it the closer, and said, with a kind of suppressed passion in his voice:

"No, Rena, you *must* be merciful to me. Have I not been patient? And you also—my dearest. You have been loyal and faithful—but your heart is mine—and it is eight years since I first loved you! You cannot resist—sooner or later the prophecy must be fulfilled—you must be my wife!"

He folded his arms about me and drew me to him, and this time I yielded wholly, let him hold me as long as he would, and kiss my lips at his will, and as I lay on his breast, my memory leaped back to the day when Brian had asked me to be his wife.

How cold had seemed his love compared with this man's passion! Oh! would he always so worship and cherish me?

"Always," he said, answering the unspoken thought. "I must always be your lover, my own: for Fate gave you, and none other, to me—gave me, and none other, to you!"

The strange words which seemed to make us so completely the slaves of an iron-handed Destiny, startled, almost frightened me.

"It was not so with me!" I said, involuntarily.

He strained me to him with a force that took my breath, and something of the look I had seen twice before flashed into his eyes.

"You did not understand," he said, in a curious hard, dry way. "You crossed your fate—the fault was yours!"

I did not know what he meant, but he soothed me with a hundred endearments, and, for the time, I forgot the words.

We were married in a month from that day, and my husband took me travelling again for a time. My Brandon friends were delighted that I had found happiness after all I had suffered, and Connie implied that she thought Raoul Wilford more suited to me than my first husband had been.

Truly it was Fate. My school-girl wish had come true, in spite of all that seemed to make it impossible. And I was happy, with that delirious happiness that makes one tremble for its long endurance. Months made no change in Raoul; he was always my lover, impassioned, tender; exacting—yes, but never selfish or jealous; as to the last, he seemed to think it impossible there could be any reason for it.

"You are mine," he said once. "You could never give a thought to any other man, or I to any woman. Whatever happens, you cannot escape your destiny."

"You are a fatalist!" I said, half-uneasily.

He drew me to his breast, and held me a long time in silence. Then he said slowly:

"Your life and my life must be one. Whatever or whoever came between us must perish!"

I shuddered as I clung to him. Was my husband's awful death, then, only a turn in the wheel of this grim fate? Must he, guiltless, all unknowing, be sacrificed to an inexorable law of affinity?

I tried not to think of these things; they appalled me. To Raoul they seemed so clear; to me they were confusing, bewildering, dreadful.

We had been married two years, and still no cloud had come over our happiness, when one day a packet arrived for me by the same post that brought me a letter from Connie, then staying at Brandon Hall. I opened the letter first, and read:

"MY DEAR RENA,

"I am posting to you something which your husband may like to have back, although it is quite useless. Do you remember the lovely gold watch he used to wear when he was here four years ago, with his name and crest engraved? He said one day it was a keepsake; and I thought he told us just before he left, when someone asked him the time, that his watch had stopped. That must have been a mistake, though he never mentioned losing it. It was fished up yesterday from the Wishing Pool. A village boy was dipping a net in to catch flies or tittlebats, when he brought up the watch, which was caught among some reeds. I don't know when Mr. Wilford lost it there, or how; it seems funny, but he will remember. Please give him my best regards, and with much love,

"Yours always,

"CONNIE."

I sat with that letter in my hand, a red mist before my eyes, an icy coldness creeping through my veins. When had Raoul lost the watch? He had it on the morning of that awful Christmas Eve; I remember his taking it out to look at the time. His only visits to the Wishing Pool were on the day after my arrival at Brandon, and the two occasions he had been to

assist in dragging for my husband's body. He left the house, Connie had told me, the day after Christmas Day, finding that he could do no more for anyone, and might be only, therefore, in the way. How, even in the dragging operations, could the watch have fallen into the water, and why had he never mentioned the loss to me, or to anyone? Still, the watch might have so fallen—only it was attached to a chain. Great Heaven! why was I asking all these questions? Some horror was creeping over me, I must shake it off. With trembling fingers I opened the packet, removed sundry layers of wool in a little wooden box, and there lay the watch, almost black from long immersion in the water. The hands pointed to *half-past four*! But what drove all the blood from even my lips was the bit of broken chain attached to the watch! How was it Connie had not noticed this? I sat like one stricken to stone, staring at it, staring with eyes that could see nothing else in Heaven or earth.

Yet I heard the door open and close, heard my husband's step, heard his soft voice say, "Why, Rena, sweetheart, what are you looking at so intently?" and I rose up, and turned round, facing him full, holding out the watch, face upwards, in my hand, the chain dangling down.

"*This!*" I said. He did not start, or cry out; his marvellous self-control did not, even in this supreme moment, so far desert him; but even he could not help the bluish pallor that crept over his features, till he looked like a dead man, with only those burning eyes living, that looked into my soul—laid bare to me his naked soul.

It was not my will that spoke at last; it was some power that ruled me, that my lips obeyed mechanically, as I still stood, holding out that awful silent witness in my unshaking hand.

"It was you who first spoke of the Wishing Pool, and lured him on to suggest going there. You did not leave him, as you said; you went with him; passed behind him, while he stood all unthinking, and suddenly pushed him forwards; but he only staggered, and clutching wildly at you, caught the chain of your watch, and snapped it off; the watch leaping out from the pocket. In that same instant you flung him from you—and he fell into the black water; that was at half-past four. On Christmas Day you told someone your watch had stopped, but you did

not say how it was; you did not tell them a murdered man dragged it down with him to his death. I know now what you meant when you said that whoever came between your life and mine must perish."

Throughout he never moved his eyes from mine; and when I ceased, he answered me:

"It was my destiny and yours. I might have been your lover. You denied me, and forced me on to the one means of claiming my right—crime. There was no other way. I told you once that the fault was yours; you crossed the web of our fate, and so, being only ignorant, and not wrong by intention, you made me what I am—a murderer; not by will of hatred or malice, but because it was my destiny, and I must fulfil it."

Was this man, who made of Fate a monster that crushed out all moral sense, all moral power, indeed man or devil? Devil! No! He was loving, devoted, unselfish, capable of the noblest deeds; yet capable also of the most hideous crime that could blacken a human soul, and send it to perdition! Was he indeed then, the creature of a grim and inexorable Destiny? Was he, in so far as that destiny ruled him and me, irresponsible? Not once had I seen in him the signs of a conscience ill at ease. Confronted now with his horrible guilt, accused by the woman he worshipped, to gain whom he had committed the sin no love could pardon, there was no inward conviction of guilt; he was fully conscious of all that his crime was to me; to himself it was only an inevitable deed which he was forced to commit, being the mere tool of fate. He came a step nearer to me.

"I have loved you," he said, "as never woman was loved. We have known such happiness these two years as were well purchased by an eternity of torment. But though you will leave me now; though you will cast me off as a traitor and assassin, *you will be mine always*, in death as in life. I shall claim you in the world beyond the grave. You will love me, through all time and eternity. You and I are one flesh—one soul—for ever!"

He clasped me in his arms; I felt his burning lips on mine, and then I knew no more. For weeks and months I wandered through a dreamland of unspeakable anguish. I knew afterwards, when I awoke, the mere wreck of my former self, that I had been mad. They told me that I had never once uttered

my husband's name. Then I had kept the hideous secret that parted us. I asked where he was ; and they answered me that no one knew. He had left the house one day, when I was found in a deadly swoon, and had never returned or been heard of since. It was Connie who told me this. I took her hand and said :

" You remember the day when I, a thoughtless school-girl, went to the Wishing Pool. I would not tell you what I saw that day in those fatal waters. It was the face of Raoul Wilford."

And I loved him still ! Yes, though that love was unspeakable torment, I loved, with a passionate worship, the man whose hand was red with my husband's blood.

Two nights ago he came to my bedside, and knelt, stretching out his hands to me. His golden hair was wet and tangled, and dank reeds hung about him ; his dark eyes met mine with passionate pleading, yet claimed me still. I know that he is lying there under the black waters ; but he cannot rest, he needs me—he draws me to him, and I must go. Last night he came again, and he drew nearer this time, and took my hands in his that were deadly cold, and drew my lips to his ashen lips. *I am his, in death as in life !* I must go to him.

To-night ! It is Christmas Eve. They do not fear to leave me ; they think I am better ; and so I shall be alone. Hush ! the wind is sighing among the fir trees, and the bells are ringing for Christmas Day. No one will hear me ; I can steal out softly, and go to join my love. I can lay my head on his breast once more, and dream the old happy dreams. He will not come for me again to-night ; he knows that I am coming to him ; and so he waits, with a smile on his lips, and the passionate love in his eyes, looking up to me as they looked that day long ago through the dark waters of the Wishing Pool.

## The Last Boat in the Lock.

BY EDITH STEWART DREWRY,

Author of "ON DANGEROUS GROUND," "ONLY AN ACTRESS," etc.

I AM an artist, and a well-known one, for the last several years, though I am not even now more than four-and-thirty; but whatsoever may be my gifts, the world would certainly not have so early recognised them but for the strange circumstances which brought me *per saltum* into the full blaze of public notice.

Not that at the time I was quite unknown. The name of Gerald Leigh was spoken of as that of a rising man, who might be expected in time to make considerable mark. I loved my art. I was ambitious, and a hard worker, without which last, the genius of a Michel Angelo can attain to nothingness—if such a paradoxical expression be permissible.

I had been very hard at work all that year, and about the middle of June, was glad to get a week's rest where I was an old *habitué* for that sort of modest holiday—at Cookham Lock, where I lodged in the pretty little house or cottage of the lockman. I was always welcome to him and his wife and son Jack, a fine lad of eighteen. I could lounge in the little garden, bounded on one side by the lock itself, sketch, read, study the faces of those who passed through the lock, or take my boat (hired *pro tem.* from Cookham), and go or come as early or late in as I pleased—in fact, do as I liked. So I donned the whites, packed my few traps and transported myself to old Tom Baynes' rustic, flower-surrounded home. That was on a Saturday, and I intended remaining just over the week, that is, till the Sunday night when I should return to my London lodgings ready to start work on the Monday.

The weather fortunately was splendid, and I thoroughly enjoyed my *dolce far niente*—up to the Friday night. If I were to live a hundred years, I can never forget that awful night.

All the morning I was out in my boat, but I came back about two to dinner, and after that remained in—that is, in the garden,

where I could always find amusement by the hour together, helping old Tom or his son with their tickets and money-taking, and observing, whilst I chatted with this one or that of the passengers in my free and easy way, especially with the pretty girls. There is always too such a delightful freemasonry on the river that is all its own.

Dear old Thames! how I love thee!

A good many boats and launches had gone through both up and down during the day, but about three there was a long lull, the pleasure traffic being of course nothing to what it is in the autumn, when all the riverside places are full of visitors.

The last craft that went through after three was a small launch going up-stream, so that the lock was left full when Tom shut the up-gates behind her and went in to his tea.

I remained where I was outside, lounging on a low, comfortable old deck-chair, basking like a cat in the glorious sunshine; I made not even a pretence of reading the book I had fetched out, but let it lie on the grass whilst I lazily feasted my eyes on the picturesque scenery before them of river and foliage and the noble heights of Cliveden beyond on the left, down stream.

But presently, it might be a little after four, I heard the cry from up-river of "Lock"—not the modern shout of the word merely repeated short and sharp several times, but the good old fashioned sing-song call. And this was a woman's voice too, rich and full-toned, giving out the prolonged "Lo-o-ck," on two musical notes, resonant and carrying the sound, as no shout ever can do. I called out at once to Tom.

"A-hoy, Tom! boat coming down stream," as I sprang up to see who was in the boat and waved my hand out as a signal that the call was heard.

She was coming down easy, a pretty craft, a single sculler rowed by a gentleman, his sole sitter being a young lady, who was steering. She too was in white, but had a crimson sailor-collar, ditto cuffs to her wide sleeves, and a crimson sash and cap.

"By Jove, she *is* pretty, Tom," I said, as the old seaman began to open one gate, "I'll do the ticket taking."

"All right, sir, here you are." Tom laughed, and handed me the ticket.

The next moment the rower shipped his sculls and the boat

floated into the lock, where the man kept her comfortably alongside our bank by holding to one of the chains attached to the walls of all the stone-built lock for that purpose.

From where I stood I took a regular good look at the occupants of the boat before I moved into prominence.

The man was, I should say, decidedly over thirty, fair, and good-looking; but to me there was something repellant in his face, a sort of latent storminess behind it, a quick, suspicious look in the eyes, a perpetual restlessness of the mouth, which, even as I watched, brought out once or twice an almost sinister curve. All of these characteristics I have found to belong broadly to a very violent jealous temper which veritably "makes the meat it feeds on." "I don't like you, sirree," said I mentally. I am blessed or cursed, whichever it may be, with the artistic temperament in full measure—sensitive, high-strung, impressionable, often almost painfully alive to a sense of sympathy or antipathy. To-day, with these two people, I was curiously impressed by both sensations, for, as instantly as the man stirred the latter, so the woman drew the former. She was quite nine or ten years his junior, exquisitely pretty, with large, beautiful dark eyes, and a skin like the soft downy side of a peach; a face that stamped itself strangely on my mental vision, partly, perhaps, for the wistful, pathetic, underlying of pain I detected in it in repose.

Tom was now beginning to open the sluices of the down-gates, and I went forward for the money. As I came into full view both passengers looked up straight at me naturally enough; the man with a quick frown, which roused a mischievous spirit of devilment in me. Over the girl's face on the contrary there went a flash of pleased recognition—unmistakably so, as when one suddenly recognises a person seen elsewhere, but a stranger personally.

"A return ticket, I suppose?" I asked of her more than him, purposely of course, and I smiled as I bowed, offering the ticket.

She smiled too, said: "Please. Thank you," and stretched up her left hand, which was nearest, for the bit of pink paper, and it gave me an odd start to see that she wore a wedding ring.

"Give it to me, please; here's the money," said the man quickly, leaning forward to intercept my hand, evidently irritated.

I took the threepence, but, coolly ignoring his hasty movement, gave her the ticket, remarking with comic gravity :

"That gives you in printed words the curious permission to pass in, through, under or over the lock *or weir*, but I fancy few would care to try that last experiment."

The gentleman said shortly: "Not unless they were fools," but his wife (so I guessed her to be, poor girl!) laughed and answered in the same strain.

"I'm not sure that I won't get my husband to see what we can do with that mode of transit. What say you, Alfred?"

"That I prefer the ordinary water-way to Bolter's Lock," was the curt, ungraciously spoken answer. "What a time that fellow is with the sluices," flinging an angry look round towards good old Tom Baynes.

I quite understood what all this palpable and uncourteous bad temper meant. The man was jealous, even because his wife noticed or was noticed by a mere stranger like myself, but I also saw by the look of quiet defiance on her resolute mouth that she was no meek, submissive fool. I said carelessly :

"The water is sinking quite as fast as is safe. You can begin to go forward soon."

Water and boat sank down, down, until the first was level with the down stream. As Tom opened the gate the lady looked up and said to me brightly :

"Good day, and I hope you'll be famous some day."

"Thank you for so kind a wish," I answered, surprised and amused, "but I had no idea that——"

But there her husband gave the boat a savage swing forwards by the next chain hanging down, and exclaimed sharply :

"My dear Clare, do mind the rail: it ground the wall!"

Which was of course not true. She only said :

"It's all right," but added to me as the boat, with which I kept pace to the gate, neared the outlet: "I saw you at the Academy in May, and you were pointed out to me as Gerald Leigh, the artist."

Then the boat swept away down stream before the strong stroke of an angry rower. Tom and I watched it, hearing distinctly on the clear air that he was speaking fiercely to the girl.

"Contemptible, jealous brute," I said indignantly. "Who are they, Tom? Have they been through here before?"

"No, sir; but the boat, the *Formosa*, belongs to Bill Grealy, at Marlow, so these two must be stopping at Marlow. I don't like him, sir, anyhow."

"Nor I, by Jove!" I answered, emphatically. "I can't imagine how she came to marry such a fellow, at all."

"Neither me, sir. He can't abear her to speak to a handsomer gentleman than hisself," chuckled Tom. "Ah! there's the missus to call you to your tea, sir."

"Thanks. And after that, Tom"—the old seaman and I were very chummy—"I'm going to sit out here and sketch those two people's faces. I can't get them out of my head. And look here, Tom, if the *Formosa* comes back by chance while I am indoors later—at supper, maybe—mind you give me the tip."

"All right, sir."

I was busy over my sketches all the time after tea till quite dusk, and so entirely had I the two faces before my memory and imagination that the likeness on my paper could not have been more perfect had the originals been sitting to me in bodily form. At nine I went in to supper, but was soon out again. A curiously inexplicable restlessness was beginning to creep over me. Most of the craft both ways, which we knew must repass the lock, had returned by this time, but not a sign of the *Formosa*, for which I was in truth unconsciously watching with a strange expectancy.

About ten Mrs. Baynes and the son Jack went off to bed, and Tom came out to me, gave a look each way and said:

"I'm about tired too, sir, wish them two blessed craft were through so as I'd turn in."

"Are all counted through but two?" I asked. "There is the *Formosa* up——"

"And a launch down, sir, what come up with a big party from Skindler's this morning while you was out; and if she'll only come through first the water'll be down beautiful ready for t'other party to come in straight."

"Yes—and there is the launch then," for at that moment we heard the shrill whistle and quick regular beat of the screw of a steam launch; then her port and starboard lights showed up the lock stream and in a short time she was in the lock. She had a lively party on board, and I caught the oddest criss-cross of chatter about the day's pleasure principally, but just as the launch began to fussily puff—puff out of the lock again my attention

was caught and chained by a name, and parts of remarks from a group on the poop.

"Yes, Clare Beverly and that husband of hers. Saw them as we passed up to-day at Grealy's place. Yes, his mad jealousy would drive any girl to bolt, I should say. Got friends at Maidenhead, I think——"

Then the launch was gone.

Beverly! so that was her name! Beautiful, unhappy Clare, who—— Bah! What a fool I was to keep thinking of her, wondering where they had gone. Perhaps to see their friends at Maidenhead and so were later back.

"Tom," I said, when he had shut the gates again, "you go and lie down on the big sofa in my parlour and I'll call you when the *Formosa* is coming."

"Thank you, sir, but you——"

"Oh, I never do turn in till very late, and I certainly shouldn't go to bed early this splendid night. Why, the moon is getting above the woods already. No, I'll keep watch out here, old chap, so you do a doss, as I tell you."

He went in and I was alone in the still, mysterious night, with the weird, deep shadows and glint of the silvery moonlight on the rippling river as the moon rose higher and higher, gazing down on earth with her face of still, awesome wisdom, as if she read one's very soul.

Half-past ten, a quarter to eleven, eleven, struck slowly out from Cookham church and somewhere else far off, then again silence, save for the eternal wash of the weir away in the back-stream, right behind the house. How deadly still it was, how lonely, myself the only creature awake, the solitary, sleepless watcher. Heavens! how sleepless and watchful—for what? I scarcely knew, save that I waited for that last boat to come into the black deep waters in the lock. Was it only this awesome solitude and vastness of silence around that grew—grew into an oppression like an actual weight? Half-past eleven! Would that boat never come? Why should I wait longer? Why could I not tear myself from my self-imposed watch? I tried, but I could not—that is the word—*could* not. Something impelled me to stop, held me at my post, no longer even pacing to-and-fro, but standing where I commanded a full view down stream, where I should see any craft the moment it rounded the

bend and passed from the shadows of the trees, into the moonlight.

A quarter to twelve! and then suddenly there came the signal for which I watched, the musical, prolonged "Lo-o-ock" of the morning, the same voice of Clare, and yet the sound made my very blood run ice-cold with a chill, nameless horror, strange and beyond measure awful, as the cry came again, afar, near, around me, real, weird, a wild wail of agonised appeal, in the slow, prolonged cadence, and, as it died away, my wide-strained eyes saw the boat rowed by the girl, sweep round the turn into the cold, pitiless moonlight—Clare Beverly only—alone in the boat at this hour. What did it mean, in Heaven's name? What had happened? She came on with a long, powerful stroke and perfect form that riveted admiration. But where was the rhythmic click-click in the rowlocks and plash of the water off the sculls? There was not a sound of either, and the curious, dreadful sensation that was creeping over me, deepened. I called hoarsely—it seemed like some strange voice:

"Tom, wake! wake! the boat is coming," and had begun to open back the gate when he came stumbling out, rubbing his dazed eyes.

"What—why?" he began, mechanically taking up his accustomed work, and pushing the huge lever beam. "Boat! I don't see nothing, sir."

"You are blind with sleep," I said, "she is closer now," I was helping him all the time, and the nearest gate was now well back against the lock wall, "and only the—only Mrs. Beverly in her; her dress is dripping wet too! Don't you see now?"

Tom stared hard at me, then down the stream, and again rubbed his eyes.

"Lord, sir, is it you or me that's queer-like? I see the boat jest there—but not a soul in her, as I'm a living man," said he, with an odd, sharp shiver. "You give me the creeps, sir."

He stepped back where he could see the water below the bank, but I felt that he was looking at me with an odd sort of fellow feeling; he was not a "sensitive," as I had been told I am, but seamen are rarely materialists, they see too much of God's wonders for that error.

As he drew back, the rower gave three or four strong strokes to send in the boat against the current with the impetus, and

shipping the sculls, was instantly in the stern seat steering, and so faced me as the boat drifted slowly past into the lock. And my God! the awful horror of that bloodless face! shall I ever forget it? I knew now, I had known it somehow in my soul from the first—that I was face to face with no mortal mystery of life and death. I knew, with a strange great calm possessing my whole being that It had come for me, that I must go back in the boat whether I would or not, alone with that awesome figure in the stern, whithersoever it steered me.

I laid my hand in Tom's, feeling him shudder as if the hand of a corpse had touched him, and said in a hoarse whisper:

"She—*it*—has come for me and I must go. Go you to sleep when you have shut the gate after—after us, Tom. This will be the last boat in the lock to-night."

Tom wrung my hand in silence and followed me to the edge of the lock above where the boat lay in gloom below by the wall. I went over, lowering myself by the chain into her, took the rower's seat, pushed off, wore her head round and pulled out of the lock down stream, with that dreadful white figure sitting opposite, steering me I knew—by the terrible prescience that had its source beyond mortal bounds—to the discovery of an appalling crime. Then I saw that the white dress was dripping wet.

I felt every nerve strung up to a kind of agony, and yet I seemed for the time endowed with a strength more than human. The boat flew at racing speed before my strokes, down the lock stream, out into the open river, past Formosa Island on the right, and then, as I had foreseen, my weird guide headed straight for the famous backwater which skirts Cliveden and Taplow Heights, parallel to the main stream nearly down to the weir and mill by Maidenhead (Bolter's) Lock.

I had to ease down now and go carefully—the current runs strong, the backwater is narrow and reedy near the banks—and how deep the gloom was under the heavy shadows of the trees, how black and deep the water looked! I shivered in the warm, summer night, as if the breeze that sighed overhead were a winter blast.

On, on, still in the grim quiet, and yet no sign to arrest the slow measured sweep of the oars in my hands—on, past the gateless old gateposts which divide the Cliveden from the

Taplow Court grounds—on, still for just another hundred yards, where the bank was rather steep and high and the water very deep and, I knew, full of bind-weeds below. I felt every fibre, every nerve to be strung up to a tension that seemed nigh to breaking point. For the first time I glanced back over my shoulder and in that second I felt a clammy dead-cold touch on my hand that made my very heart stand still, but I instantly checked the boat, starting round towards——

It was gone, I was alone in the awful solitude and the silence of a dark deed, done to-night. I bent over the boat's side—I saw the white garments below, caught perhaps amongst reeds and tree roots. I could surely discern the beautiful dead face, staring up with wide, sightless eyes through the water—my God! the corpse of a murdered woman!

\* \* \* \* \*

I made my way to the Maidenhead police station to get help and give full information and a description of the murderer Alfred Beverly, adding that I could give the inspector a drawing of the man, and of course I went back with the police to the scene of the crime, and when the body was brought ashore and examined by the divisional surgeon he found marks on the white throat which showed that the assassin had at least half throttled his helpless victim before he drowned her. The watch Clare wore we found had stopped at twenty-five minutes to twelve, that is, just ten minutes before I heard and saw Clare's spirit self, my twin soul. And assuredly but for my aid, so mysteriously invoked, the black deed would have remained undiscovered long enough for the murderer to make good his escape. Now, any attempt came too late—descriptions, and the likeness of him were fatal obstacles, and he was traced and arrested the next evening.

I have little more to tell of this strange, most awful story, which I do not even pretend to explain, for our finite mortality can only, we know, "see through a glass darkly." I can only say what happened—the why is beyond me.

The whole case and its extraordinary circumstances made a sensation not soon forgotten, and naturally my strange evidence, which Tom Baynes corroborated, was talked over, discussed, canvassed by everyone.

There stood the logic of fact. I had not, could not possibly have known or suspected the murder unless my story were true.

The wretched jealous husband's guilt was proved fully at the trial and the law's just penalty was carried out, while for me, Gerald Leigh, the artist, the tragic story fulfilled poor Clare's generous and even terribly prophetic wish: "I hope you will be famous one day!" I stood at once in the fierce white light of public notice. I received commission after commission at almost my own terms, and a leading picture dealer offered me an enormous price for a portrait of Clare Beverly. I refused. Only my two or three very intimate friends, and now, my dear wife, ever see a picture which hangs in my private room next the studio—a picture which something beyond myself impelled me to paint, so deep and haunting was the impression on my inmost soul of the scene and first sight of that mysterious messenger. Underneath the picture I have written only "The Last Boat in the Lock."